Research Paper

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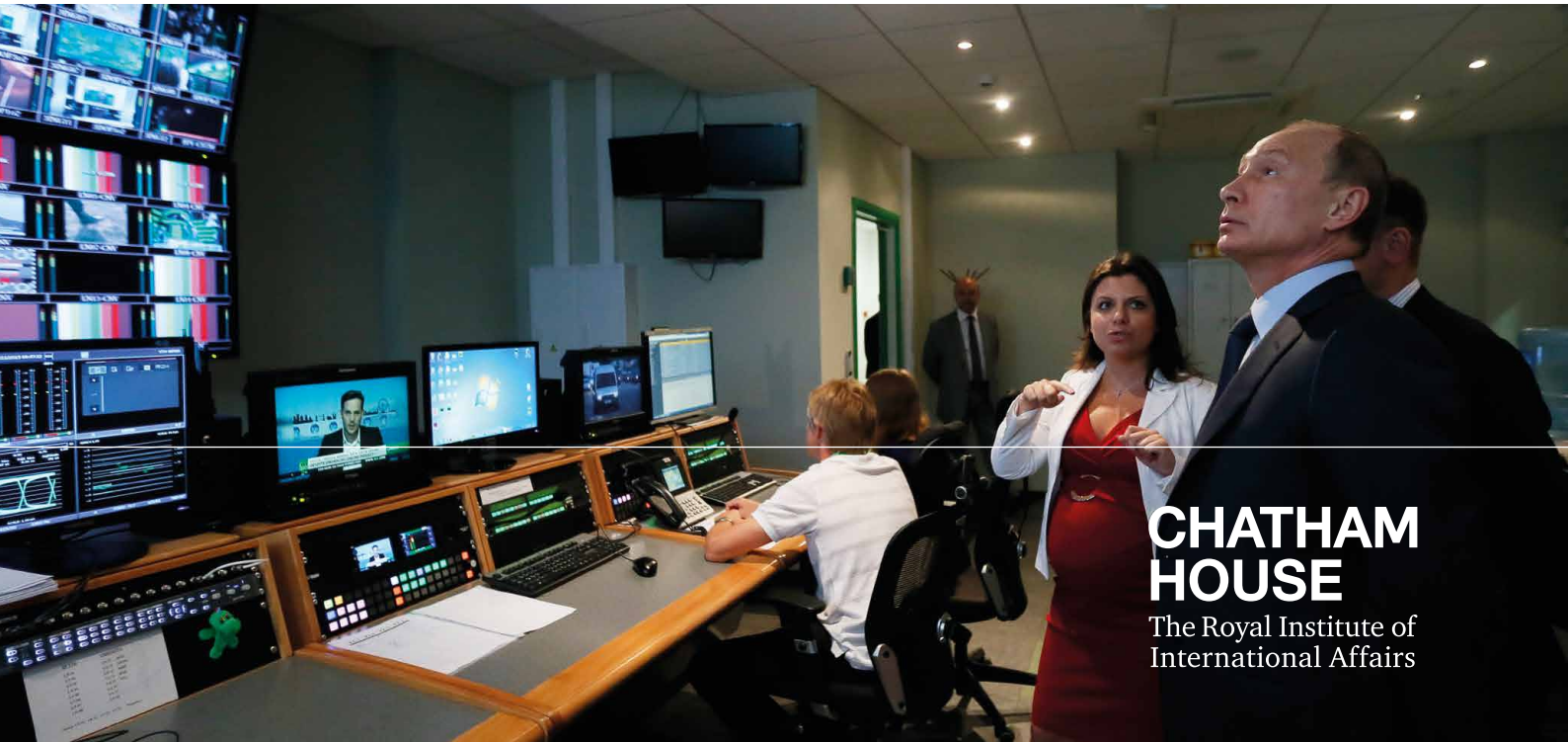
Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West

Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power



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Summary

- In the last two years, Russia has demonstrated its return to an assertive foreign policy by successful military interventions in Ukraine and Syria. The capabilities it employed to do so surprised the West, despite being well advertised in advance and their development described in detail by the Russia-watching community in Western nations.

- The distinctive Russian approach to operations in Ukraine gave rise to an impression among some observers that its military had employed fundamentally new concepts of armed conflict. The widespread adoption of phrases such as 'hybrid warfare' and 'Gerasimov doctrine' reinforced this perception of novelty, and was indicative of a search for ways to conceptualize – and make sense of – a Russian approach to conflict that the West found at first sight unfamiliar.

- Nevertheless, the techniques and methods displayed by Russia in Ukraine have roots in traditional Soviet approaches. Since the end of the Cold War, Russia's military academics have displayed an unbroken and consistently developing train of thought on the changing nature of conflict and how to prevail in it, including – but certainly not limited to – the successful application of military power. As a result, despite modern technological enablers, Russia's intentions and actions throughout the Ukraine conflict have been recognizable from previous decades of study of the threat to the West from the Soviet Union. Today, as in the past, Western planners and policy-makers must consider and plan not only for the potential threat of military attack by Russia, but also for the actual threat of Moscow's ongoing subversion, destabilization and 'active measures'.

- Two specific tools for exercising Russian power demand close study: the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation; and the state's capacity for information warfare. In both of these fields, Russia's capabilities have developed rapidly in recent years to match its persistent intentions. The most visible demonstration of this has been the unprecedented near-total transformation of Russia's armed forces since 2008. This transformation and the accompanying rearmament programme are continuing, and the Russian military is benefiting from ongoing 'training' under real operational conditions in Ukraine and Syria.

- Russia has now demonstrated both the capacity of its conventional military capabilities and willingness to use them. The trend of the past 10 years appears set to continue – the more Russia develops its conventional capability, the more confident and aggressive it will become. Despite the perception of Russian operations in eastern Ukraine as irregular warfare, it was a large-scale conventional military cross-border intervention in August 2014 that brought to a halt the previously successful Ukrainian government offensive, and stabilized the front line close to the one currently holding under the Minsk agreements.

- This readiness to use military force will only have been heightened by the experience of campaigning in Syria from October 2015 onwards. The February 2016 Syrian ceasefire agreement, concluded on Russian terms, in particular confirms for Moscow once again that

assertive military intervention is an effective means of achieving swift and positive foreign policy results.

- Russia's practice of information warfare has also developed rapidly, while still following key principles that can be traced to Soviet roots. This development has consisted of a series of adaptations following failed information campaigns by Russia, accompanied by successful adoption of the internet. Misconceptions about the nature of Russian information campaigns, and how best to counter them, remain widespread – in particular the notion that successful countermeasures consist in rebutting obvious disinformation wherever possible. Russian disinformation campaigns continue to be described in the West as failing due to the implausibility of Russian narratives. But by applying Western notions of the nature and importance of truth, this approach measures these campaigns by entirely the wrong criteria, and fundamentally misunderstands their objectives.

- Russia continues to present itself as being under approaching threat from the West, and is mobilizing to address that threat. Russia's security initiatives, even if it views or presents them as defensive measures, are likely to have severe consequences for its neighbours. Russia's growing confidence in pursuing its objectives will make it even harder for the West to protect itself against Russian assertiveness, without the implementation of measures to resist Russian information warfare, and without the availability of significant military force to act as an immediate and present deterrent in the front-line states.

- In short, Russian military interventions and associated information warfare campaigns in the past two years have not been an anomaly. Instead they are examples of Russia implementing its long-standing intent to challenge the West now that it feels strong enough to do so. For Western governments and leaders, an essential first step towards more successful management of the relationship with Moscow would be to recognize that the West's values and strategic interests and those of Russia are fundamentally incompatible.

1. Introduction

The speed and decisiveness of assertive action by Russia against Ukraine in early 2014 left the West fumbling for responses. Some two years later, there has been ample opportunity to study the means and methods used by Russia to pursue its interests. The result has been a reversal of two decades of assumptions about the nature of relations with Russia, and fierce debate about how to respond to the new realization of Russia's true nature and ambition.

In the process, Western planners and commentators have developed a broad range of adjectives to describe the Russian approach to the use of military and other tools of coercion demonstrated in Crimea and the rest of Ukraine. Russia's conduct of operations has been described as hybrid, ambiguous, asymmetric, non-linear, and more besides. Continuing confrontation in Ukraine and, more recently, Russian involvement in Syria have focused Western attention even more closely on Russia's new military capabilities, and have reintroduced the world to old Soviet-style disinformation and subversion in the form of 'information warfare'. The re-emergence of these previously dormant Russian foreign policy tools has caused widespread surprise, and this in turn has fostered a perception that their use represents a radically new and different form of warfare.

This paper examines these two reinvigorated aspects of Russian capability: use of the armed forces, and use of information warfare. It seeks to answer two questions in the light of the events of 2014–15. What new capabilities is Russia displaying? And what can or should the West do about them?

Context

Russia's return to assertive attempts to dominate neighbours and bring them back into its sphere of obedience has not been a sudden event, but rather a steady process of escalating pressure. This process has run in parallel with the growth in Russia's confidence and strength, derived initially from energy revenues during the 15 years of rising oil prices from 1999 onwards. After a brief period of optimism for cooperation with the West following the 9/11 attacks in the United States, Russia began testing a series of hostile levers against the newly independent states on its western periphery. Of these, energy cut-offs are the best known; but others include economic warfare, financial and social destabilization, cyber offensives in various forms, and more.[1]

August 2008 saw a significant escalation in this process, in the form of the use of armed force against a neighbour. Regardless of the allocation of blame for the start of the Georgian conflict, from a Russian perspective its result validated the use of military force as a foreign policy tool. The swift return to business as usual with the West after the conflict confirmed Moscow's conclusion that force can be used against neighbours to achieve strategic gains at little long-term cost.

[1] For a more detailed review of this process, see Keir Giles, Philip Hanson, Roderic Lyne, James Nixey, James Sherr and Andrew Wood, *The Russian Challenge*, Chatham House Report, June 2015.

At the same time, the deficiencies in the performance of Russia's armed forces in its war with Georgia provided the political impetus for a thorough overhaul of the military. Russia seized the opportunity to refine its military tools in order to make the use of armed force, and the accompanying information warfare effort, more flexible and precise. The results were visible in the smooth and efficient operation to seize control of Crimea in 2014.

What was new in Crimea?

But the successful seizure of Crimea and subsequent intervention in eastern Ukraine should not be seen as a sudden and unexpected departure from the norm for Russia's relations with its neighbours. Instead, these events need to be viewed in the context of decades of applying unfriendly instruments of punishment and persuasion, and of making use of new tools and opportunities as they arise; all rooted in long-established Russian principles and assumptions about the nature of international relations. As described by prominent British Russianist James Sherr:

> Today's Russian state has inherited a culture of influence deriving from the Soviet and Tsarist past. It bears the imprint of doctrines, disciplines and habits acquired over a considerable period of time in relations with subjects, clients and independent states.[2]

Even the seizure of a neighbour's territory by military force was not new, despite being repeatedly presented as such in both media and expert commentary. Long-term Russia observers were startled at how swiftly the armed conflict in Georgia had been forgotten. And most recently at the time of writing, the terms of the February 2016 ceasefire in Syria will have confirmed for Russia once again that direct military action overseas is Russia's best method of achieving strategic objectives with little, if any, adverse consequence. Syria represents the fourth occasion, following Kosovo, Georgia and Ukraine, on which decisive Russian military intervention has substantially altered the situation in Moscow's favour. In the last three instances, this has received international endorsement – the 2008 ceasefire was imposed on Georgia by a French president, the Minsk protocols were overseen by both French and German leaders, and now the Syrian agreement has been accepted by the entire 20-member International Syria Support Group. The result can only be to encourage Russia to further military adventurism, confident that the risks of significant international reaction are low.

This research paper builds on themes introduced briefly in an earlier Chatham House report, *The Russian Challenge*, to examine the lessons to be drawn from specific aspects of recent Russian actions. It begins by reviewing whether Russia's approach can rightly be called 'hybrid warfare', and argues not only that the hybrid label is unhelpful and misleading but also that it gives an entirely misplaced impression of novelty. Further chapters review the current status and future prospects of Russia's continuing military modernization and rearmament effort, and trace the roots of Russia's ongoing information warfare campaigns in long-standing Soviet principles of subversion and destabilization of target countries. After considering a range of likely trigger points for assertive Russian action against the West, the paper concludes with a review of the policy implications for the United Kingdom, and the West more broadly, arising from Russia's persistent intentions and still-developing capabilities.

[2] James Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia's Influence Abroad* (London: Chatham House, 2013).

2. Russian 'Hybrid Warfare'?

In the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea and the early stages of conflict in eastern Ukraine, a perception of novelty led to a search for terminology to describe the character of the conflict. Non-linear, ambiguous, or indeed 'special war'[3] are all terms that have been used to attempt to explain Russia's direct and indirect aggression against Ukraine. The term 'hybrid war' gradually gained ascendancy in the second half of 2014[4] – adopted from earlier concepts in which the notion of hybridity was used to describe a variety threats bearing little resemblance to current Russian activity.[5]

The hybrid phraseology became firmly embedded in NATO's conceptual framework for characterizing Russian operations in Ukraine, and as a result is now permeating the doctrine and thinking of NATO member states. But in order to encompass Russian campaigning, it has been stretched in many directions from its original meaning. Consequently, even expert groups commissioned to develop thinking on hybrid warfare have expressed reservations about the term's applicability and relevance.[6]

When first developed in the middle of the last decade, the concept of hybrid warfare related to fighting insurgency, rather than to dealing with low-intensity war waged by an aspiring great power.[7] It reflected the challenge experienced in Iraq and Afghanistan of conducting counter-insurgency operations which occasionally morphed into actions much closer to high-intensity conventional warfighting.[8] In the words of Frank Hoffman, routinely credited with coining the hybrid phraseology, it denoted a 'blend of the lethality of state conflict with the fanatical and protracted fervor of irregular war'.[9]

A number of detailed studies, including one issued six months before Russia's intervention in Ukraine,[10] maintained a definition of hybrid warfare pertaining to the simultaneous employment of both conventional and irregular forces. But the application of the term to operations in Ukraine has brought with it a diversity of new interpretations of hybridity.[11]

[3] John Schindler, 'How Russia Wages Special War Against NATO and the EU', The XX Committee, 14 August 2014, http://20committee.com/2014/08/14/how-russia-wages-special-war-against-nato-and-the-eu/.
[4] As in, for instance, Bridget Kendall, 'Hybrid warfare: The new conflict between East and West', BBC News, 6 November 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-29903395.
[5] Frank J. Cilluffo and Joseph R. Clark, 'Thinking About Strategic Hybrid Threats – In Theory And In Practice', *PRISM*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2012, pp. 47–63.
[6] 'Hybrid threats: perceptions and responses', International Institute for Strategic Studies, January 2015. See also Jonathan Marcus, 'Putin problem gives Nato headache', BBC News, 1 December 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-30273813.
[7] US Army Training Circular (TC) 7-100, Hybrid Threat, 2010.
[8] Sydney J. Freedberg Jr, 'The Military's New Hybrid Warriors', *National Journal*, 14 March 2009, http://www.nationaljournal.com/magazine/the-military-s-new-hybrid-warriors-20090314.
[9] Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007, p. 38.
[10] John R. Davis Jr, 'Defeating Future Hybrid Threats', *Military Review*, September–October 2013, pp. 21–29.
[11] As explored in detail in Guillaume Lasconjarias and Jeffrey A. Larsen (eds), *NATO's Response to Hybrid Threats*, NATO Defense College, December 2015.

NATO and hybridity

Originally introduced by NATO's Allied Command Transformation as part of planning for out-of-area activities, hybrid warfare terminology gained a foothold in NATO Headquarters in mid-2014 as 'the Russian hybrid model in Ukraine' became a means of explaining operations that did not fit neatly into NATO's operational concepts.[12] According to a senior individual well placed to follow the internal debate, the hybrid concept subsequently 'took on a life of its own within NATO'.[13] Alternatives such as 'ambiguous warfare' – the United Kingdom's preferred term – lost out as 'hybrid' gained momentum and eventually became accepted as the shorthand for the Russian offensive campaign.[14] Establishing this nomenclature also involved NATO arriving at new definitions for hybrid threats, while seeking ways to reconcile them with already existing ones. The result was qualifications and caveats, such as the notion of 'hybrid warfare under a nuclear umbrella' or 'strategic hybrid warfare'.[15]

However, the framing of Russian operations within a concept of hybridity originally designed to describe entirely different threats gave rise to severe misgivings among the Russia-watching expert community. Private opposition from eastern NATO members, including Poland, was reinforced by public critiques from well-informed defence experts from the front-line NATO and non-NATO states – including Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.[16]

Even Frank Hoffman placed caveats on the term's use with reference to Russian campaigning against Ukraine. While accepting that 'hybrid as a term is useful to draw attention to the problem',[17] he points out that '[t]he problem with the hybrid threats definition is that it focuses on combinations of tactics associated with violence and warfare (except for criminal acts) but completely fails to capture other non-violent actions'.[18] These, of course, include information warfare campaigns, which were a key element of Russia's move to seize Crimea.

[12] Adrian Croft and Sabine Siebold, 'NATO and EU to work together to counter Crimea-style "hybrid" warfare', Reuters, 14 May 2015, http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/05/14/uk-nato-ministers-idUKKBN0NZ1RM20150514; 'NATO Foreign Ministers discuss boosting cooperation with EU, other partners', NATO, 14 May 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_119421.htm?selectedLocale=en.
[13] Speaker under the Chatham House Rule, 'Perspectives on Hybrid Warfare', International Institute for Strategic Studies–Germany Federal Ministry of Defence Experts' Workshop, Berlin, 23 June 2015.
[14] As put by US Air Force General Frank Gorenc: 'I made these slides before the [September 2014] summit in Wales. The verbiage now is hybrid warfare. But ambiguous warfare was used to describe what I thought the Ukraine crisis represented.' Frank Gorenc, 'USAFE-AFAFRICA Update', AFA – Air & Space Conference and Technology Exposition, 15 September 2014, http://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/af%20events/Speeches/15SEP2014-GenFrankGorenc-USAFE-AFAFRICA%20Update%20at%20AFA.pdf.
[15] 'NATO and New Ways of Warfare: Defeating Hybrid Threats', report of a NATO Defense College conference, Rome, 29–30 April 2015. The report states: 'Hybrid warfare has been around in many guises over the centuries. However, strategic hybrid warfare is new.'
[16] Nadia Schadlow, 'The Problem with Hybrid Warfare', War on the Rocks, 9 April 2015, http://warontherocks.com/2015/04/the-problem-with-hybrid-warfare/; Jyri Raitasalo, 'Hybrid Warfare: Where's the Beef?', War on the Rocks, 23 April 2015, http://warontherocks.com/2015/04/hybrid-warfare-wheres-the-beef/; Merle Maigre, *Nothing New in Hybrid Warfare: The Estonian Experience and Recommendations for NATO*, German Marshall Fund of the United States, February 2015; Jānis Bērziņš, Director at the Center for Security and Strategic Research, National Defence Academy of Latvia, conversation with author, June 2015; Margarita Šešelgytė, 'Can Hybrid War Become the Main Security Challenge for Eastern Europe?', European Leadership Network, 17 October 2014, http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/can-hybrid-war-become-the-main-security-challenge-for-eastern-europe_2025.html.
[17] Frank G. Hoffman, conversation with author, June 2015.
[18] Frank G. Hoffman, 'On Not-So-New Warfare: Political Warfare Vs Hybrid Threats', War on the Rocks, 28 July 2014, http://warontherocks.com/2014/07/on-not-so-new-warfare-political-warfare-vs-hybrid-threats/.

Nothing new

Critics of the misuse of the hybrid warfare concept point to its giving rise to a widespread public perception that NATO nations face a new form of warfare, for which no preparation had been made or was indeed possible.[19] This perception of novelty is entirely misplaced: even before application to Russia, studies of hybrid warfare were arguing that 'the concept is not needed or is redundant to other definitions of mixed forms of warfare, or offers nothing unique'.[20] According to a 2012 academic review: 'Hybrid warfare has been an integral part of the historical landscape since the ancient world, but only recently have analysts – incorrectly – categorized these conflicts as unique.'[21]

Prior studies of hybrid conflict in its original conceptual framework have examined a plethora of examples from history. Israel's 2006 war with Hezbollah is regularly cited as the example that crystallized the theory. But many other precedents are referenced, with the freshest in US minds being involvement in Vietnam.[22] With the additional case study of ongoing Russian operations, this view that 'hybrid' defines nothing new has now been forcefully argued by a wide range of informed experts, from Canada –

> Whatever the label (hybrid, limited war, full-spectrum, sixth generation, new generation), Russia's method of warfare against Ukraine is not new, despite the claims of many analysts. War was rarely ever a purely military affair.[23]

– to Russia itself: 'any attempt to fully define it strips the idea of any novelty'.[24]

Specifically in the case of Russia:

> Many elements of this 'new' warfare: subversion, physical and informational provocation, economic threats, posturing with regular forces, the use of special forces, and the military intelligence coordinating paramilitary groups and political front organizations, have been part of the Russian/Soviet lexicon of conflict for generations. The Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) concluded in its study of the Crimean operation that calling it new reflected a failure of imagination, rather than novel Russian military capabilities. Thus, presenting the operations in Ukraine as new-generation warfare obfuscates as much as aids understanding of Russian warfare. Much of this 'new' warfare is old wine in new bottles.[25]

These are not the only examples of features of warfighting which are now routinely ascribed to a hybrid approach in fact being commonplace. Denying that regular troops are present when they

[19] Thomas Gibbons-Neff, 'The "new" type of war that finally has the Pentagon's attention', *Washington Post*, 3 July 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/the-new-type-of-war-that-finally-has-the-pentagons-attention/2015/07/03/b5e3fcda-20be-11e5-84d5-eb37ee8eaa61_story.html.
[20] Timothy McCulloh and Richard Johnson, *Hybrid Warfare*, Joint Special Operations University, August 2013, http://jsou.socom.mil/JSOU%20Publications/JSOU%2013-4_McCulloh,Johnson_Hybrid%20Warfare_final.pdf.
[21] Peter R. Mansoor, 'Introduction: Hybrid Warfare in History', in Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor (eds), *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 1.
[22] Karl Lowe, 'Hybrid War in Vietnam', in Murray and Mansoor (eds), *Hybrid Warfare*.
[23] *Russia and the West: The Consequences of Renewed Rivalry*, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, June 2015, https://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca/pblctns/wrldwtch/2015/RUSSIA_AND_THE_WEST-ENG.PDF.
[24] Ruslan Pukhov, 'Nothing "Hybrid" About Russia's War in Ukraine', *Moscow Times*, 27 May 2015, http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/nothing-hybrid-about-russia-s-war-in-ukraine/522471.html.
[25] Oscar Jonsson and Robert Seely, 'Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict: An Appraisal After Ukraine', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2015, pp. 3–4.

plainly are, in order to frustrate responses which depend on positive attribution, has multiple precedents: in the 20th century, Soviet troops deployed in secret to Spain, Afghanistan, Egypt, Syria, Vietnam, Cuba, Korea and Angola, and this is surely not an exhaustive list.[26] Neither is the combination of intimidation, spurious legitimation and information campaigns, backed by the prospect of full-scale invasion, anything new: by these criteria, a previous round of expansionism by Moscow in 1939–40 shared sufficient characteristics with the present day to also be termed 'hybrid warfare'.[27] The blurring of boundaries between peace and war is by now also no novelty:

> The grey area that lies between the states of war and peace, from being an identifiable and very narrow place at the end of World War II, has now pushed its boundaries outward to an extent that most military operations are conducted in the grey zone.[28]

As explained by Finnish Chief of Defence General Jarmo Lindberg:

> Typical of this time is that the boundaries of peace, crisis and war coalesce into a kind of grey area of instability. The line between traditional and unconventional warfare blurred – or rather, they are mixed in a new way with each other by new elements of warfare employed. Contemporary warfare, now also known as hybrid warfare, is precisely what this is all about, as events in eastern Ukraine show us.[29]

'Hybrid' viewed from Russia

Crucially, another specific objection to the use of hybrid terminology to describe Russian operations is that it fails accurately to reflect Russian thinking on the nature of war, and hence obscures rather than illuminates the range of options open to Moscow. Hybrid, as a catch-all euphemism, is now being described in Russian writing on warfare, translated literally as '*gibridnaya voyna*'. But it is significant that the context in which the phrase appears is the same as another direct translation, '*kibervoyna*' for cyber war: both phrases only appear when referring to Western thinking, rather than Russian approaches.[30] The translation is essential, as there is no original Russian phrase to describe either of these ideas, which simply do not fit within a Russian conceptual framework. When asked to comment on discussion of the 'hybrid threats' presented by Russia, a senior officer trained and educated in the Soviet system shrugged dismissively and said: 'That's just special operations [*spetsoperatsii*].'

Russia learns from the West and sometimes appears to be mimicking it, but then adapts the lessons to its own specific circumstances. The West, in the Russian view, fosters and facilitates regime change, for example in Georgia, the Middle East and North Africa. Russia perceives Western techniques and approaches; studies and reports on them; and then applies them in Ukraine. It is

[26] Pavel Felgenhauer, 'Russia's Secret Operations', *Perspective*, Vol. 12, No. 1, September–October 2001, http://www.bu.edu/iscip/vol12/felgenhauer.html.
[27] Vitalii Usenko and Dmytro Usenko, 'Russian hybrid warfare: what are effects-based network operations and how to counteract them', Euromaidan Press, 17 January 2015, http://euromaidanpress.com/2015/01/17/russian-hybrid-warfare-what-are-effect-based-network-operations-and-how-to-counteract-them/.
[28] Sanu Kainikara, 'Air Power in the Information Age: The Deciding Factor', Air Power Development Centre, February 2015, p. v.
[29] Jarmo Lindberg, 'Puolustusvoimain komentajan puhe 210. valtakunnallisen maanpuolustuskurssin avajaisissa' [Speech of the Commander of the Finnish Defence Forces at the opening ceremony of the National Defence Course], Ministry of Defence, Finland, 15 September 2014, http://tinyurl.com/nu3n2xr.
[30] In fact *kibervoyna* is entirely absent from an internal Russian General Staff dictionary of key terms in this field. See 'Slovar' terminov i opredeleniy v oblasti informatsionnoy bezopasnosti' [Dictionary of terms and definitions in the field of information security], *Voyennaya Akademiya General'nogo Shtaba* [Military Academy of the General Staff], 2nd edition (Moscow: Voyeninform, 2008).

this study that results in public statements like the one by Chief of General Staff Valeriy Gerasimov in February 2013[31] – which came to be known as the 'Gerasimov doctrine' and has been widely misrepresented in analysis outside Russia.[32]

The notion of a 'Gerasimov doctrine' in particular exemplifies the danger of buzzwords becoming fixed features of our cognitive landscape, simply because they fit neatly on a PowerPoint slide. The phrase has entered the language representing something far removed from Russian reality, and is now used at the seniormost levels in a manner that suggests it is fundamentally misunderstood. This is exemplified by the speech written for General Joe Votel, commander of US Special Operations Command, in September 2015, which stated: 'We increasingly see adversaries purposefully selecting such strategies to stay within the gray zone. If anything, they have broadcasted their intentions as we see in China's Three Warfares and Russia's Gerasimov Doctrine.'[33]

Instead of a statement of Russian intention, what Gerasimov in fact described was the Russian perception of how the US-led West intervenes in the internal affairs of states, exacerbating instability by engendering 'colour revolutions' in those that resist US hegemony, and financing and supplying weapons to rebel groups and mercenaries.[34] To understand how this perception has been folded into existing Russian thinking on the new nature of war, we should look closely not only at previous Russian military thought, but also specifically at the lessons drawn by Russia from Western military interventions.

Other, equally important aspects of the same 2013 presentation and article by Gerasimov are routinely overlooked. One is the assessment that Russia may become drawn into military conflicts as powers vie for resources, many of which are in Russia or in its immediate neighbourhood. By 2030, he suggested, the 'level of existing and potential threats will significantly increase', as 'powers struggle for fuel, energy and labour resources, as well as new markets in which to sell their goods'. In such a context, some 'powers will actively use their military potential'. Furthermore, he focused on the manner in which warfare is evolving such that combat is moving away from 'traditional battlegrounds', such as land and sea, 'towards aerospace and information', as illustrated by conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa.[35]

Despite Russian doctrinal references to indirect and asymmetric methods,[36] hybridity does not define the totality of the new Russian way of war. The role of conventional and asymmetric tools and capabilities in Russian military thinking and doctrine has to be placed in the context of Moscow's perceived overall strategic challenges, in which major conventional and nuclear conflict

[31] Valeriy Gerasimov, 'Ценность науки в предвидении' [The Value of Science is in Foresight], *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 27 February 2013, http://vpk-news.ru/sites/ default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf. English translation by Robert Coalson and commentary by Mark Galeotti are available at https://in-moscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/.
[32] Charles K. Bartles provides an essential guide to Gerasimov's article in 'Getting Gerasimov Right', *Military Review*, January–February 2016. See also Jonsson and Seely in 'Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict: An Appraisal After Ukraine', pp. 1–22.
[33] General Joe Votel, Commander US SOCOM, 'SOF Operations In The Gray Zone', presentation at NATO Special Operations Headquarters, 10 September 2015.
[34] 'Zasedaniye mezhdunarodnovo diskussionnovo kluba "Valdai"' [Meeting of the 'Valdai' International Discussion Club], 24 October 2014, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860.
[35] Cited in 'Russia may be drawn into resources wars in future – army chief', RT, 14 February 2013, http://www.rt.com/politics/military-conflict-gerasimov-threat-196/.
[36] Charles Bartles, 'The Significance of Changes in Russia's Military Doctrine', *OE Watch*, Vol. 5, No. 6, June 2015, http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/OEWatch/201506/201506.pdf.

loom large. Investment in countering US capabilities in the aerospace and nuclear domains has traditionally trumped investment in Russia's Ground Troops.[37]

Russia does indeed embrace the notion of asymmetric responses: but asymmetry applies in the conventional domain as well. Russia will be entirely content to make use of asymmetries of mass, presence, speed and will in high-intensity conventional warfighting if required. According to one argument, Russia's approach in Ukraine is in fact simply warfare, with no need for qualifying adjectives.

But even the notion that 'hybrid warfare' as demonstrated in Ukraine consists of no more than conventional warfare coupled with a highly developed disinformation campaign would not indicate anything new in Soviet and Russian practice *per se*.[38] The growing importance of information warfare was a development in Russian military thinking observed prior to the present crisis – including in a perceptive commentary by Stephen Blank, a veteran scholar of the Russian military, two weeks before the Crimea operation. Blank noted that 'information operations, which may encompass broad, socio-psychological manipulation, … [sit] comfortably in the mainstream of Russian military thought'.[39]

The precise nature of this combined approach had been signalled in Russian military writing, in particular the work of Sergey Chekinov, a department head at the Russian General Staff Academy, and head of the General Staff's Centre for Military-Strategic Research. As he wrote shortly before the current crisis began:

> Asymmetric actions, too, will be used extensively to level off the enemy's superiority in armed struggle by a combination of political, economic, information, technological, and ecological campaigns in the form of indirect actions and nonmilitary measures. In its new technological format, the indirect action strategy will draw on, above all, a great variety of forms and methods of non-military techniques and non-military measures, including information warfare to neutralise adversary actions without resorting to weapons (through indirect actions), by exercising information superiority, in the first place […] Beyond a shadow of a doubt, the aggressive side will be first to use nonmilitary actions and measures as it plans to attack its victim in a new-generation war. With powerful information technologies at its disposal, the aggressor will make an effort to involve all public institutions in the country it intends to attack, primarily the mass media.[40]

The approach is instantly recognizable in Russia's information campaigns against Ukraine and its supporters.

Another disadvantage to the hybrid label is that it is wide-ranging and nebulous in meaning, but understanding Russia needs specificity. As noted in one study in early 2015:

[37] Keir Giles and Andrew Monaghan, 'Russian Military Transformation – Goal In Sight?', US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, May 2014, http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1196.
[38] John Besemeres, 'Russian disinformation and Western misconceptions', Inside Story, 23 September 2014, http://insidestory.org.au/russian-disinformation-and-western-misconceptions; Vitalii Usenko and Dmytro Usenko, 'Russian hybrid warfare: what are effects-based network operations and how to counteract them'.
[39] Stephen Blank, 'Signs of New Russian Thinking About the Military and War', Eurasia Daily Monitor, 12 February 2014, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41954#.
[40] Sergey Chekinov and S. A. Bogdanov, 'The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War', *Military Thought*, No. 4, 2013. Earlier relevant work by Chekinov and Bogdanov includes 'Asymmetric Operations to Ensure Russia's Military Security', *Voyennaya Mysl'*, No. 3, 2010, pp. 13–22.

> 'Hybrid war' can hardly be considered a definitive doctrine for Russia's future power projection in its neighbourhood [...] Rather than a genuine strategic concept built from the ground up by the Russians themselves, 'hybrid war' is merely a label attributed to Russian actions in Ukraine by the West, in an effort to make sense of cascading phases of a security crisis in which all sides but Russia seem to have been caught off balance.[41]

Rather than resulting from a radical change in how Russia uses its military, the specific nature of operations in Crimea in particular was thus more to do with the way military effort was integrated with other Russian instruments, most prominently information warfare.[42] As explained by Kristin Ven Bruusgaard:

> [A]lthough Russia demonstrated new principles of warfighting in Crimea, most of the tactics and doctrine displayed represented traditional Russian (or Soviet) warfighting principles refitted for modern war. [But] Russia integrated military tools with other tools of pressure in innovative ways, and made use of a seamless transition from peace to conflict.[43]

Managing this transition, and the related discipline of escalation control, is a key element of the overall campaign within which Russia places use of the military – and leads to some of the conclusions drawn in the much-quoted presentation by Gerasimov.[44] And yet, this too reflects principles long established in Russian military thought. Consideration of how wars begin, and 'new' and 'non-traditional' ways of their doing so, has been ongoing in Russia since it was first given impetus by the new geopolitical and geographical reality facing Russia at the fall of the Soviet Union[45] – and indeed can trace roots much further back in Soviet military thinking.[46]

According to an influential Latvian study, the Crimea operation marked a shift in emphasis in Russian operations involving the Armed Forces – from straightforward destruction of the enemy to campaigning focusing more on achieving effect through influence.[47] This necessitates close coordination between different arms of the Russian state machinery, as reflected in recent attempts to better harness and direct the broad and unruly range of instruments of Russian state power.[48] The Armed Forces, and the capacity for intensive information warfare or subversion of the adversary, are simply two of the most important long-standing but reinvigorated instruments of this power.

[41] Michael Kofman and Matthew Rojansky, 'A Closer look at Russia's "Hybrid War"', Wilson Center, April 2015, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/7-KENNAN%20CABLE-ROJANSKY%20KOFMAN.pdf.
[42] Stephen J. Cimbala, 'Sun Tzu and Salami Tactics? Vladimir Putin and Military Persuasion in Ukraine, 21 February–18 March 2014', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2014.
[43] Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, 'Crimea and Russia's Strategic Overhaul', *Parameters*, Vol. 44, No. 3, Autumn 2014.
[44] Valeriy Gerasimov, 'Tsennost nauki v predvidenii' [The Value of Science is in Foresight], *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 27 February 2013, http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632.
[45] See David Glantz, *Future Soviet Military Strategy*, SASO [Soviet Army Studies Office] - SSRC [Soviet Studies Research Centre] Publication C77, Sandhurst, December 1990.
[46] Vladimir Voronov, '«Зеленые человечки» Сталина: «гибридная война» была впервые опробована вовсе не в Крыму' [Stalin's 'Little Green Men': 'hybrid warfare' was by no means first tested in Crimea], Svobodnaya zona, 3 November 2014, http://www.szona.org/gibridnaya-voina/.
[47] Jānis Bērziņš, *Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defence Policy*, National Defence Academy of Latvia Centre for Security and Strategic Research, April 2014, http://www.naa.mil.lv/~/media/NAA/AZPC/Publikacijas/PP%2002-2014.ashx.
[48] Andrew Monaghan, *Defibrillating the Vertikal? Putin and Russian Grand Strategy*, Chatham House Research Paper, October 2014.

3. The New Russian Army

> Borders cannot be redrawn at the barrel of a gun.
> *Barack Obama, 3 September 2014*[49]

> We cannot of course forget the events of Crimea. I wish once again to thank our Armed Forces.
> *Vladimir Putin, 19 December 2014*[50]

The seizure of Crimea did not test Russian troops in combat; but the appearance, equipment, and high standard of training and discipline of the units deployed there demonstrated beyond doubt that significant change had taken place in the Russian Armed Forces. By comparison with the force that went into action in Georgia in 2008, the troops used in Crimea and against the Ukrainian mainland were demonstrably more effective, flexible, adaptable and scalable for achieving Russia's foreign policy aims.[51] The depth and scale of change in the Russian military over the past seven years are impossible to overstate, and few of the certainties that underpinned analysis of Russian military capability in the previous decade still hold good. The fact that Russian servicemen throughout the services, and not just in the elite units seen in Crimea, now resemble those of a modern military and have shed their previous plainly post-Soviet appearance is symbolic of much deeper transformation, and of readiness to change further.[52] As noted by the Swedish Defence Research Agency: 'Although Russia will probably not be able to reach all of the ambitious goals of its reform programme for the Armed Forces, there is little doubt that its overall military capability will have increased by 2020.'[53]

The primary aim of this increased capability is to close the gap with other major powers, in order both to reduce Russia's perceived vulnerability to a devastating first strike and to restore the Russian military's credibility as a deterrent factor and tool of influence (not only in strictly military terms, but also in foreign policy more broadly – as conclusively demonstrated by its deployment to Syria). This aim is sometimes expressed in very simplistic terms by senior Russian military officers: the Soviet Union was respected because it possessed a 4.5 million-strong army, they say, and a military that needs to be taken into serious consideration is now once again ensuring Russia's voice is heard and heeded internationally.

One specific goal is to provide Russia with a counter to the United States' actions so that the latter is not the only state with unlimited freedom of movement globally, including in Moscow's self-designated 'sphere of privileged interest'. This is a long-term aspiration. For example, a senior Russian diplomat has referred to a previous phase of Russian long-term military preparations –

[49] 'Remarks by President Obama to the People of Estonia', White House, 3 September 2014, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/03/remarks-president-obama-people-estonia.
[50] 'Расширенное заседание коллегии Министерства обороны' [Expanded meeting of the Defence Ministry Board], President of Russia, 19 December 2014 [URL no longer available].
[51] Frédéric Labarre, 'Defence Innovation and Russian Foreign Policy', in J. Larry Black (ed.), *Russia after 2012* (London: Routledge, 2012).
[52] Gustav Gressel, *Russia's Quiet Military Revolution, And What It Means For Europe*, European Council on Foreign Relations, October 2015.
[53] Carolina Vendil Pallin (ed.), *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2011*, Swedish Defence Research Agency, August 2012, p. 21, http://www.foi.se/Global/V%C3%A5r%20kunskap/S%C3%A4kerhetspolitiska%20studier/Ryssland/%C3%96vriga%20filer/Russian%20Military%20Capability%202011%20FOI%20August%202012.pdf.

during which the country was not capable of campaigning against the prime enemy – following the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807 and leading up to the confrontation with Napoleon in 1812.[54] Today, timescales for military reorganization and preparation are even longer, but at the time of writing Russia is already close to the 2020 strategic horizon set by previous iterations of its National Security Strategy and its current Military Doctrine, and to the related deadline for completion of its military transformation.[55]

In addition, for Russia a strong military is an essential attribute of a great power, whether needed for actual security challenges or not.[56] In the words of Sergey Karaganov: 'It looks like the military buildup is expected to compensate for the relative weakness in other respects – economic, technological, ideological and psychological.'[57] At the same time, according to a leading Russian expert on security strategy: 'In the Russian view of national security, military security is fundamental, and the only aspect of security which is indispensable.'[58] Thus, prioritizing the reconstitution of Russia's military over other economic considerations can be expected to be maintained into the future regardless of the state of relations with partners and competitors, and in particular while relations with the West run through their familiar predictable cycle of thaw and freeze.[59]

Russia's military transformation

A 2003 expert study of the condition of the Russian military made the following assessment:

> By the beginning of the 21st Century [...] over a decade of governmental neglect, military incompetence, corruption and failure to adjust to changing conditions, and popular hostility/indifference had combined to break a once impressive military machine. It would take at least 20 years to restore even a scaled-down but modernised version.[60]

Nevertheless, thanks to prodigious effort and unprecedented funding, just over 12 years later the Russian Armed Forces are already approaching the end of a long process of transformation into a tool fit for 21st-century warfare. This is still a work in progress: the capability demonstrated by operations in Crimea and in and near Ukraine is still developing.[61]

The starting point for this transformation was examination of the military's performance in Georgia in August 2008. The evident need to correct deficiencies in organization and capability gave the political impetus for overcoming institutional resistance to change. But the changes that were then

[54] The specific reference was to analysis by Dominic Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon: The True Story of the Campaigns of War and Peace* (New York, NY: Viking, 2010).
[55] Keir Giles, 'Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020', NATO Defense College, June 2009, http://www.conflictstudies.org.uk/files/rusnatsecstrategyto2020.pdf.
[56] Aleksey Arbatov and Vladimir Dvorkin, *Voyennaya reforma Rossii: sostoyaniye i perspektivy* [Russia's Military Reform: Status and Prospects], Carnegie Moscow Centre, 2013, p. 23.
[57] Sergey Karaganov, 'Security Strategy: Why Arms?', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 26 October 2012, eng.globalaffairs.ru/pubcol/Security-Strategy-Why-Arms-15716.
[58] Professor Vladimir Lisovoy, speaking at NATO Defense College, Rome, November 2007.
[59] Keir Giles, *The State of the NATO-Russia Reset*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, September 2011, http://conflictstudies.org.uk/files/CSRC_NATO-Russia-Reset_preview.pdf.
[60] Charles Dick, *The Future Of Conflict: Looking Out To 2020*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, April 2003, p. 44.
[61] The aims and progress of the transformation effort have been amply described elsewhere, most recently in 'Brothers Armed', a survey of the Russian and Ukrainian militaries published in late 2014 by the CAST defence consultancy in Moscow.

implemented reflected concepts developed much earlier.[62] In effect, oil revenues and military failings in Georgia facilitated reforms that had been envisaged for over 20 years. Even one of the most dramatic changes that was proposed for the structure of the Russian army, and subsequently revised – the move from a division-based to a brigade-based structure – was not a new idea. At the time the Russian army was first formed in 1992,

> the General Staff was attempting a major change in the army's force structure by introducing a 'Corps-Brigade' structure to replace the traditional 'Army-Division-Regiment' chain of command. When the redeployments [from Europe] finished in the mid-1990s the ground forces were left with a hotch-potch of formations which fitted neither model.[63]

Throughout the 1990s, the Russian military suffered a series of chaotic and counterproductive false starts to reform.[64] It was only after the arrival in power of Vladimir Putin that real achievements began to be made.[65] Even then, fundamental change was difficult before the Georgia war provided justification for radical transformation. This led to upheaval on a huge scale: as late as 2010, the army was still effectively in chaos.[66] Finally, from approximately 2011 onwards, the Armed Forces began to settle into their new form and the new Russian army began to take shape.[67] Russian military capability began slowly to come into line with Russian military aspirations: Moscow's threat perceptions, and concepts of how those threats should be addressed, had changed little during the period when the West was intent on friendship with Moscow and perceived no threat from Russia's collapsing military.[68]

The purely military capabilities demonstrated in Crimea in early 2014 were misleading. The operation made use of selected elements of elite special forces units, which were in no way representative of the broad mass of Russia's Ground Troops. Instead they were drawn from the special forces of the Southern Military District, the Airborne Assault Troops (VDV) and marine infantry, all of which had consistently been given priority for funding and equipment over other branches of the Armed Forces.[69] Furthermore, the uniquely advantageous circumstances that Russian troops enjoyed in Crimea – especially basing and transport rights, and the presence of forces already in place before the start of the crisis – are unlikely to be replicated in future operations.[70]

At the same time, comparing the military capability provided by the troops and equipment on display in Crimea and those along the Ukrainian border provided a snapshot of how far Russia had, and had not, come in creating a military fit for 21st-century warfare as envisaged in Moscow. A

[62] For a detailed examination of the continuity in Soviet and Russian military planning, see Timothy L. Thomas, *Recasting the Red Star*, Foreign Military Studies Office, 2011.
[63] Michael Orr, *The Russian Armed Forces As A Factor In Regional Stability*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, 1999.
[64] Stephen Blank, *Russia's Armed Forces on the Brink of Reform*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, October 1997.
[65] Isabelle Facon, *Les sources de la modernisation de l'outil militaire russe: ambitions et ambiguïtés de Vladimir Poutine* [Sources of the modernization of the Russian military tool: Vladimir Putin's ambition and ambiguity], Conflict Studies Research Centre, August 2005; Roger N. McDermott, *The Recreation of Russia's Ground Forces High Command: Prepared For Future War?*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, March 2002.
[66] Rod Thornton, *Military Modernization and the Russian Ground Forces*, US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, June 2011.
[67] Giles and Monaghan, 'Russian Military Transformation'.
[68] B. M. Barynkin, 'Military Threats To Russia And Development Problems In Her Armed Forces', *Voyennaya Mysl'*, January–February 1999, pp. 2–7.
[69] Anton Lavrov, 'Nachalo reformy Vozdushno-desantnykh voysk' [The beginning of the reform of the Airborne Assault Troops], in Mikhail Barabanov (ed.), *Novaya armiya Rossii* [The New Russian Army], CAST, Moscow 2010.
[70] For a detailed evaluation, see Niklas Granholm, Johannes Malminen and Gudrun Persson (eds), *A Rude Awakening. Ramifications of Russian Aggression Towards Ukraine*, Swedish Defence Research Agency, June 2014.

programme of major exercises and 'snap inspections', which continued through 2013, had built up Russia's experience of deploying large numbers of troops briskly, and the results were visible in the build-up of forces on the Ukrainian border in 2014. Strategic mobility from across Russia was executed at an impressive scale, using both rail and air movement, and the forces were then sustained in the field for several months with no obvious deterioration in their capability. During 2014, Russia also gained valuable practice at concentrating troops under the cover or pretext of scheduled or unscheduled exercises.

Overall, troop movements demonstrated impressive agility and speed, to match the speed of decision-making displayed in Crimea. But for the time being, Russia's rearmament programme has still to deliver substantial quantities of new vehicles and weapons systems to the Ground Troops, meaning that little of the equipment on display is modern even by Russian standards. While the emphasis in rearmament rhetoric is on high technology, much of the equipment actually in service still consists of familiar robust models considered good enough to do the job. There is a clear understanding that much of this equipment is outclassed by the latest and best Western equivalents, but it is considered adequate for dealing with likely opponents in the near abroad.

Demonstrations of well-practised transport and logistic capability do not necessarily translate into warfighting ability. Nevertheless, the deployments towards and into Ukraine are continuing to provide valuable operational experience for those units which are sending contingents, whether battalion task groups or smaller formations.[71] In the words of one expert observer, the Russian ground troops have benefited enormously from being provided with a 'rolling 18-month live fire exercise'.[72] At the same time, operations in Ukraine already show just how effectively Russia has put right some of the problems that were highlighted in the war with Georgia. Then, there were complaints that the Russian electronic warfare (EW) capability was deficient, and use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) practically non-existent. Now, countering Russia's highly effective use of both EW and UAVs is one of the key areas where the Ukrainian government is asking for help. Some of Ukraine's other requests, for instance for secure communications and anti-armour weaponry, also indicate where Ukrainian forces need to counter Russian advantages.[73]

The new Russian soldier

But while much of Russia's military hardware in its land forces in 2014 may still have looked broadly post-Soviet, its soldiers suddenly did not. Even though the well-equipped and highly professional troops seen in Crimea were not typical, improvements have taken place throughout the forces in recent years. The introduction of recognizably modern personal equipment has progressed slowly but definitely, with morale and attitudes in the rest of the army transformed even before the prestige boost that accompanied success in Crimea. Huge increases in pay and allowances since 2005 (including instances of salaries tripling overnight) have combined with a recovery in social

[71] Igor Sutyagin, 'Russian Forces in Ukraine', Royal United Services Institute, March 2015, https://www.rusi.org/publications/other/ref:O54FDBCF478D8B/.
[72] The extent to which this has affected Russian combat capability is the subject of a future proposed Chatham House paper, provisionally titled *Russian Roulement*.
[73] For examination of the introduction and role of UAVs in the Ukrainian context, see also Kim Hartmann and Keir Giles, 'UAV Exploitation: A New Domain for Cyber Power', NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, June 2016, forthcoming.

standing to leave Russian soldiers unrecognizably better off than they were a decade ago.[74] Servicemen also appear to have recovered a sense of purpose. The rise in salaries has been dramatic, but it has been earned through a much-increased workload. In the words of one Russian general, 'now we have something to get on with'.[75]

Russia's main problem with these new, motivated servicemen is a perennial one: there are simply not enough of them. The period of conscription was reduced from two years to one in 2007, at exactly the same time that the demographic collapse of the 1990s was feeding through into the age group ready for call-up.[76] The cut in the conscription term reflected a degree of wishful thinking on the part of military planners and had inevitable consequences for training; even the special forces units deployed for the seizure of Crimea contained conscripts who had served less than six months in the army and had to be left behind during the operation.

Attempts to make up the personnel shortfall by recruiting more 'contract' professional servicemen were initially hampered by inadequate salaries and poor conditions. As a result, manpower planning has been a continuing challenge. In 2014, for the first time, more professional soldiers entered the Armed Forces than conscripts, attracted, among other things, by the much more competitive salaries. But recruitment targets overall remain unrealistic, and the proportion of posts which are actually filled remains at approximately 80 per cent.

Russia still faces challenges in using its conscripts for complex operations, especially since it took some time to adjust to the reduction in length of compulsory service from two years to one. Recent analysis in the West has argued that the army may be facing manpower challenges in maintaining forces opposite Ukraine. But the conclusion to this argument was that Russia might be able to put 'only' 90,000–100,000 men in the field, which still dwarfs anything its Western neighbours might be able to muster to resist Russian pressure.[77]

Rearmament prospects

Chronic undermanning is not the only obstacle to Russia achieving its military aims: economic and financial problems also pose a serious challenge. The collapse in the price of oil during 2014–15 reduced government revenues to unsustainable levels, and radically affected the rouble exchange rate. The prevailing view in the West is that Russia's economy is 'in no shape to fund a truly serious military buildup'.[78] Another assessment is that its defence spending plans are unaffordable in the long term, but that such spending provides a short-term boost to economic performance figures.[79]

[74] For a detailed examination of the start of this process, see Keir Giles, *Military Service in Russia – No New Model Army*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, May 2007.
[75] Anonymous conversation with author, June 2015.
[76] See Keir Giles, *Where Have All The Soldiers Gone? Russia's Military Plans Versus Demographic Reality*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, October 2006.
[77] Sutyagin, 'Russian Forces in Ukraine'.
[78] Richard K. Betts, 'Pick Your Battles: Ending America's Era of Permanent War', *Foreign Policy*, November/December 2014, p. 23.
[79] Julian Cooper, 'Prospects for Russian Military Spending and the Re-equipment of the Armed Forces', PowerPoint presentation, January 2015.

The economic challenges were starkly illustrated by the bankruptcy in early 2015 of the producer of Russia's headline-grabbing Armata tank series after a reduction in the number of orders placed.[80] Nevertheless, it seems clear that the rearmament programme overall will continue whether or not it is affordable. Unsustainable military expenditure does not affect Russia on the same timescale or in the same manner that it would a Western liberal democracy. It has long been clear that the military programmes exceeded Russia's economic capabilities, but the funding plans remain largely in place – after all, it is popularly believed that Aleksey Kudrin was sacked as finance minister in 2011 for pointing out that the country could not afford them, even before the Russian economy was critically undermined by the slump in oil prices. Some aspects of the military budget have been trimmed, and some elements of the modernization programme postponed, but Putin has repeatedly stated that rearmament remains a top priority.[81] Critics have said that he is repeating one of the major mistakes of the Soviet Union, which prioritized military spending over all else, and consequently spent itself into effective bankruptcy while the standard of living of its people remained dire.[82] Russia today is a long way from that situation; but incomes and living standards are already falling while the government continues to flood the military and the defence industry with cash. The issue is politically charged, and critics of defence expenditure need to tread carefully: Deputy Defence Minister Tatiana Shevtsova has hinted that any attempt to reduce defence expenditure would be the result of a Western plot to hinder Russia's military modernization.[83]

In addition, Western economic sanctions against Russia are impeding purchases of electronic components and advanced production equipment needed for the rearmament programme.[84] A further headache for military modernization is the loss of access to the Ukrainian defence industry. Until very recently, even nearly 25 years after the end of the Soviet Union, some parts of the Russian and Ukrainian military-industrial complexes still functioned in close cooperation, to the extent that they were described by one insider as 'a single unified military-industrial complex'. This complex has now been cut in half, with the result that neither half can function properly, he continued.

Without access to Ukrainian industry, Russia has to source key components for its warships, aircraft and weapons systems elsewhere – or start to build them itself. One example is warship construction: with marine gas turbine engines now no longer available from the Zorya-Mashproekt plant in Mykolaiv, Ukraine, Russia must consider starting production domestically, while construction is halted on the vessels to which those engines were intended to be fitted.[85]

Russia's continuing objective is to increase military capability to the point where it once again overmatches not only its immediate neighbours, but also Western militaries from further afield.

[80] Yevgeniy Kalyukov and Anatoliy Temkin, 'Альфа-банк решил обанкротить производителя танка «Армата»' [Alfa-Bank decided to bankrupt the producer of the Armata tank], RosBiznesKonsalting, 8 May 2015, http://top.rbc.ru/business/08/05/2015/554cc0a59a794760aee215b4.
[81] Thomas Grove, 'Economic Crisis Slows Putin's Plans to Modernize Russian Military', *Wall Street Journal*, 6 May 2015, http://www.wsj.com/articles/economic-crisis-slows-putins-plans-to-modernize-russian-military-1430955418.
[82] For more detail on the funding rescheduling and spending priorities, see Keir Giles, 'Military transformation in Russia', in Pauline Eadie and Wyn Rees (eds), *The Evolution of Military Power in the West and Asia* (London: Routledge, 2016).
[83] Ivan Safronov, '«Свертывание военных программ обернется для государства повышенными затратами» - Замминистра обороны Татьяна Шевцова о финансировании Минобороны' ['The slowdown of military programmes will result in increased expenditure for the state' – Deputy Minister of Defence Tatiana Shevtsova on the financing of the Ministry of Defence], *Kommersant*, 23 December 2014, http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2639373.
[84] Jonathan Marcus, 'Russia boosts military might despite sanctions', BBC News, 8 May 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-32622653.
[85] 'Engines for Russian naval ships will be made in Rybinsk instead of Ukraine's Nikolayev, says Rogozin', Interfax, 12 August 2014.

With the Ground Troops developing capability for action as well as movement, and deficiencies in European defence spending continuing, if current trends were to continue indefinitely this goal would eventually be within reach. As Julian Lindley-French puts it:

> Russian forces may still be short of the fully-professional army they are seeking to achieve by 2020. However, the increasingly militarised Russian state will continue to drive towards such a force and Moscow will study carefully how to improve their military performance as well as the paucity of Alliance forces and resources in the Baltic region. The essential strategic truth is that Russian military weaknesses would likely be less critically decisive at the point and moment of engagement than NATO military weaknesses.[86]

Implications for neighbours

Russia intends to develop the capability to operate against several neighbours at once.[87] This means military adventures elsewhere, and not just in Syria, could be contemplated at the same time as continuing pressure on Ukraine. This realization has led to sudden retrospective attention to the major exercises which Russia had been conducting for a number of years – and the implications of their scenarios for the neighbours who appear to be targeted.[88] Putin's boast that Russian troops could occupy several European capitals within two days[89] may be part of the military posturing to which both he and Russia are devoted, but the question remains to what extent it also reflects a genuine assessment of NATO's capability to mount a swift and effective military response.

In any case, Russia does not need to mount an actual invasion in order to use military intimidation against its neighbours. The Crimea operation demonstrated that it is already willing to use those parts of its military it considers fit for purpose, while the main force is still being developed. In the meantime, Russia's Ground Troops created effect simply by existing. Throughout much of 2014 and early 2015, the main force opposite the Ukrainian border served as a distraction from actual operations within Ukraine, by being depleted or augmented as the political situation dictated, keeping Western governments and intelligence agencies in a perpetual state of speculation as to the likelihood of a full-scale invasion. The actual capability of those troops was irrelevant; they were ready and available to be inserted into Ukraine as and when required to counter Ukrainian government offensives.[90]

This is far from the first example of Russian assets causing problems just by being there. In December 2007, flight operations from the aircraft carrier *Admiral Kuznetsov* in the direct vicinity

[86] Julian Lindley-French, 'How Do We Defend Baltic Freedom?', Speaking Truth Unto Power, 20 January 2015, http://lindleyfrench.blogspot.ch/2015/01/how-do-we-defend-baltic-freedom.html.
[87] Adrian Croft, 'Russia could soon run multiple Ukraine-sized operations: U.S. general', Reuters, 16 January 2015.
[88] Liudas Zdanavičius and Matthew Czekaj (eds), *Russia's Zapad 2013 Military Exercise: Lessons for Baltic Regional Security*, Jamestown Foundation and Latvian National Defence Academy, Washington, DC, December 2015. Another such exercise routinely cited is Zapad-2009. In almost all Western assessments, the exercise is described as concluding with a simulated nuclear strike on Warsaw. But this scenario appears problematic; in a discussion with the author, a senior Russian military officer who had been a member of the planning committee for Zapad-2009 was surprised to hear this and said that a simulated nuclear strike had never been part of the exercise. Much of the English-language reporting on the subject can be traced back to a single news story in the United Kingdom's *Daily Telegraph* by Matthew Day, entitled 'Russia "simulates" nuclear attack on Poland'. This headline, not written by the reporter, is not supported by the actual content of the story, and there is no mention of an attack on Warsaw.
[89] Justin Huggler, 'Putin "privately threatened to invade Poland, Romania and the Baltic states"', *Telegraph*, 18 September 2014, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/11106195/Putin-privately-threatened-to-invade-Poland-Romania-and-the-Baltic-states.html.
[90] Paul Goble, 'Putin's Strategy in Ukraine – Sow Panic, Provoke, Invade and Then Repeat the Process', Interpreter, 3 November 2014, http://www.interpretermag.com/putins-strategy-in-ukraine-sow-panic-provoke-invade-and-then-repeat-the-process/.

of Norwegian oil platforms temporarily prevented their operators from accessing them. At the same time a major oil spill took place in the area following unexplained damage to a pipeline that the *Kuznetsov* had just passed over. Eight years later, the pattern continues, with Russian warships hindering the installation of power and telecommunications cables between Sweden and Lithuania – important for reducing the latter's energy dependence on Russia – by obstructing and diverting cable-laying vessels.[91] What instances like this demonstrate is that even in cases where Russia's combat capability is considered antiquated or inadequate, as with the *Kuznetsov*, simple assertive presence can cause significant difficulties for the West while stopping well short of actual operational use of forces where their deficiencies would immediately become clear. Russia's current operations in Syria provide another example. The deployment of advanced air defence missile systems, and provocative use of their radar, provides a significant complicating factor for Western air operations over or near Syria regardless of whether there is an actual Russian intention to use them.[92]

Nevertheless, Russia does already possess large, well-trained, well-equipped and capable forces capable of rapid intervention with little visible preparation. In addition to the wide range of troops loosely referred to as 'Spetsnaz',[93] these include much of the VDV. Writing in 2011, British academic and former soldier Rod Thornton noted that Russian foreign policy ambitions would 'inevitably result in occasional Russian military interventions abroad' – and that the implement of choice for this would be the VDV.[94] According to Rear Admiral Chris Parry, former director-general of the UK Ministry of Defence's Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, the VDV are now:

> … the shock troops of hybrid and proxy warfare emerging in the modern world. Although the tactics are not new, their overt political use in the murky, ambiguous space between authoritarian and democratic regimes should concern all those that fear the return of direct great power competition.[95]

Again, there is little in this that is new. Despite comments in 2012 that the Russian General Staff's Main Operations Directorate was laying down plans for the use of the Armed Forces in 'non-standard situations',[96] there are repeated precedents dating back much further for the use of Russian special forces for *coup de main* operations – seizing key points to facilitate regime change, or presenting facts on the ground without an overt declaration of war. To claim that this is a new phenomenon is to ignore the use of Russian special and airborne forces in Prague in 1968, Kabul in 1979, or Pristina in 1999. This long-standing tradition is explicitly one of the purposes of special forces units and the VDV, just as it was during Soviet times[97] – as indeed is the ability to 'show the flag, demonstrate support for a government or exhibit a "presence" in a region'.[98]

[91] Christina Zander, 'Undersea Electricity Cable Generates Friction Between Russia and Baltics', *Wall Street Journal*, 6 May 2015, http://www.wsj.com/articles/undersea-electricity-cable-generates-friction-between-russia-and-baltics-1430931797?mod=wsj_nview_latest.
[92] Josh Rogin and Eli Lake, 'New Russian Air Defenses in Syria Keep U.S. Grounded', Bloomberg, 17 December 2015, http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-12-17/new-russian-air-defenses-in-syria-keep-u-s-grounded.
[93] This covers a confusingly broad range of individuals, well beyond the special reconnaissance brigades of the Military Districts of the VDV and the General Staff's new Special Operations Command. See Aleksey Nikolsky, 'Russian "Spetsnaz" Forces – from Saboteurs to Court Bailiffs', *Moscow Defense Brief*, No. 1, 2014.
[94] Rod Thornton, *Organizational Change in the Russian Airborne Forces: The Lessons of the Georgian Conflict*, US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, December 2011.
[95] Commenting on Rob O'Gorman, *Strategic Order of Battle: Russian Airborne Forces* (London: Open Briefing, 2014).
[96] Lt-Gen Andrey Tretyak, former head of the Main Operations Directorate, speaking at a NATO-hosted event in November 2012.
[97] 'The Soviet Army: Specialized Warfare and Rear Area Support', US Department of the Army Field Manual 100-2-2, 1984, pp. 5–3.
[98] David Glantz, *The Soviet Airborne Experience*, US Army Command and General Staff College Combat Studies Institute, November 1984, p. 156.

Military intimidation

Within Europe, exhibiting a presence in a region is a role filled primarily by Russia's Long Range Aviation, with flights towards the airspace of NATO allies and other nations. In the United Kingdom, routinely inaccurate media reporting of the detail of Russian military flights approaching UK airspace distracts both from the normality of these events and from their potential real significance in the case of direct confrontation between the two countries.[99] In particular, it does nothing to challenge the popular perception that in order to pose a problem, a hostile aircraft has to be directly overhead, or at least within national airspace – a perception several decades out of date, given current capabilities to carry out intelligence or strike missions at ranges into the hundreds of kilometres. Critically, such reporting obscures the equally significant Russian submarine activity, at times supported by these same aviation missions. This is a particular concern for the United Kingdom given the continuing absence of a maritime patrol aircraft capability pending the implementation of the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review, and consequent reliance on foreign assistance to track submarine movements.[100]

Besides their significance in political and strategic communication terms, long-range patrols by Russian aircraft have constituted a valuable training programme since their resumption in 2007, in effect bringing the lost generation of aircrew that was insufficiently trained during the previous decade up to standard. The longer-range air missions present 'an opportunity to improve crew performance through the planning associated with such long sorties, regular air-to-air refuelling and increased training'.[101]

But for countries physically closer to Russia, the increase in air activity presents direct security concerns simply in terms of airspace use, even before the military implications are considered. A range of dangerous incidents over the Baltic Sea has been recorded.[102] A significant escalation in the potential danger came in March 2015, when Russian bombers, escorted by fighters, approached Sweden with transponders inactive, after previously being identified and tracked by Danish and Italian aircraft based in Lithuania.[103] This approach was considered especially dangerous since one of the Tu-22M bombers was travelling at supersonic speed while transiting the Riga Flight Information Region (FIR).[104]

The Swedish foreign minister, Margot Wallström, was subsequently quoted as saying that Sweden was 'tired of always having to protest' against this dangerous practice.[105] But there are few grounds

[99] As with, for instance, 'Russian bomber flew inland over Cornwall, witness claims', *Guardian*, 19 February 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/feb/19/russian-bomber-flew-inland-cornwall-uk-airspace-witness. See also, 'How to spot a Russian bomber', BBC News, 20 February 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-magazine-monitor-31537705.
[100] Steph Cockcroft, 'The Hunt for Red October: Ministry of Defence forced to ask US for help in search for Russian submarine thought to be lurking off North Atlantic coast', *Daily Mail*, 9 January 2015, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2902862/The-Hunt-Red-October-Ministry-Defence-forced-ask-American-help-search-Russian-submarine-thought-lurking-North-Atlantic-coast.html; 'RAF search after "Russian submarine spotted off Scotland"', BBC News, 22 November 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34896956.
[101] 'Russian air patrols: long-range ambitions', Strategic Comments, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Vol. 21, No. 4, 25 June 2015.
[102] For a survey of potentially dangerous situations arising from provocative or irresponsible Russian air activity, see Ian Kearns, Thomas Frear and Łukasz Kulesa, *Dangerous Brinkmanship: Close Military Encounters Between Russia and the West in 2014*, European Leadership Network, 10 November 2014, http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/dangerous-brinkmanship-close-military-encounters-between-russia-and-the-west-in-2014_2101.html; and *Report on occurrences over the high seas involving military aircraft in 2014*, European Aviation Safety Agency, undated.
[103] 'Svenskt incidentflyg övervakade flygning' [Swedish response flight monitored flight], Swedish Armed Forces, 24 March 2015.
[104] 'Russian Tu-22 bomber scares NATO air defenses flying at supersonic speed over the Baltic Sea for the first time', The Aviationist, 24 March 2015, http://theaviationist.com/2015/03/24/tu-22-supersonic-over-baltic/.
[105] 'Sweden, NATO Report Russian Military Planes Over Baltic Sea', Associated Press, 24 March 2015.

to suppose that verbal protests carry any weight with Russia or might cause it to adjust its behaviour, especially against a background of Russia continuing to withdraw from remaining bilateral military transparency and consultation measures with Western countries.[106]

Provocative or irresponsible behaviour by Russian aircrew continues to show lack of respect for airspace boundaries and safety norms. This includes in Syria, despite this attitude having already led to the shooting down of one Su-24M bomber by Turkey in November 2015.[107] The previous month, Russia and the United States had agreed procedures for avoiding incidents between their aircraft operating in Syrian airspace.[108] These included maintaining horizontal separation of three miles, and 3,000 feet vertically. But these procedures were routinely flouted by Russia in subsequent months, both before and after the loss of the Su-24M, with aggressive and provocative manoeuvring continuing in close proximity to US aircraft. The risks of this brinkmanship are compounded by the difficulties of communicating with Russian aircraft, which may not be fitted with radios operating on the same frequencies.[109] In these situations and others, Russian assertiveness constantly probes the restraint of Western counterparts.

Aggressive air movements by Russia align with the new emphasis on the potential for use of nuclear weapons in statements by President Putin and other officials.[110] In addition to the distinctive role that strategic nuclear weapons play in Russian national identity,[111] the use of both strategic and tactical nuclear weapons is now described in Russia as being 'viewed as a realistic possibility and even something to be embraced'.[112] This gives rise to a dangerous situation in which each side holds entirely different views on when, if ever, such weapons could be employed, with a resulting increased risk of miscommunication and misunderstanding.[113] Here, as elsewhere, the Russian attitude displays continuity whereas the West has moved on. Soviet plans for an assault on Western Europe included early use of tactical nuclear weapons,[114] and these still play a significant – but not publicly acknowledged – role in Russian doctrine.

Understanding Russia's thinking about how to manage the risks of conventional, nuclear and cyber escalation by the West is essential to understanding its view of its nuclear arsenal. In the case of other nuclear powers, for example the United Kingdom, nuclear weapons are not linked with foreign policy. Russia, however, uses their possession as an integral part of its means to constrain competitors. This principle applies whether there is real contemplation of their use, or whether they

[106] Kathrin Hille and Neil Buckley, 'Russia quits arms pact as estrangement with Nato grows', *Financial Times*, 10 March 2015, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f6c814a6-c750-11e4-9e34-00144feab7de.html.
[107] Keir Giles, 'Few will believe Russia's "proof" that its jet was in Syrian airspace', *Guardian*, 24 November 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/nov/24/russia-proof-jet-syrian-airspace-turkey.
[108] Lisa Ferdinando, 'U.S., Russia Sign Memorandum on Air Safety in Syria', DoD News, 20 October 2015, http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624964/us-russia-sign-memorandum-on-air-safety-in-syria.
[109] Reuben F Johnson, 'Russian Su-24M communications equipment blamed for shootdown', *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, 26 November 2015, http://www.janes.com/article/56295/russian-su-24m-communications-equipment-blamed-for-shootdown.
[110] Tom Nichols, 'If Putin goes nuclear', The War Room, 1 September 2014, http://tomnichols.net/blog/2014/09/01/if-putin-goes-nuclear/.
[111] Tom Parfitt, 'Ukraine Crisis: Putin's Nuclear Threats are a Struggle for Pride and Status', *Daily Telegraph*, 29 August 2014, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/11064978/Ukraine-crisis-Putins-nuclear-threats-are-a- struggle-for-pride-and-status.html. For a more detailed examination of this phenomenon, see also Keir Giles and Andrew Monaghan, 'European Missile Defense and Russia', US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, July 2014, http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1219.
[112] Stephen Ennis, 'Russian media learn to love the bomb', BBC News, 23 February 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-31557254.
[113] Aleksandr Golts, 'Russia's Nuclear Euphoria Ignores Reality', *Moscow Times*, 6 October 2014, http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/russia-s-nuclear-euphoria-ignores-reality/508499.html.
[114] Interview with Colonel-General Matvey Burlakov, *Kommersant-Vlast*, 29 March 2005, http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/558042. See also Jan Hoffenaar and Christopher Findlay (eds), *Military Planning For European Theatre Conflict During The Cold War: An Oral History Roundtable, Stockholm, 24–25 April 2006*, Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, 2007.

are simply used to intimidate through rhetoric.[115] And it will only have been reinforced by Russia's experience of a period when its conventional forces were relatively incapable, greatly increasing the relative significance of nuclear forces in the defence of the country. According to two Western analysts writing as recently as the early part of this decade, non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) are:

> … prized and important assets to Moscow, and they have become even more prized and important assets as Russia's conventional military has become weaker. They are seen more and more as the fallback option if Russia one day faces some sort of defeat in a conventional conflict.[116]

One hawkish Russian commentator argues, 'The result is that when a threat escalates from armed conflict to local war, we will have to go over to the use of nuclear weapons.'[117] And according to other Western experts, the utility of NSNW for constraint ('de-escalation') in a situation in which Russia's conventional forces are overmatched is of greater concern in the 21st century due to the lack of 'nuclear discipline'; the absence of a sense of danger of imminent nuclear annihilation leads to less restraint.[118]

Russia's large stocks of NSNW are often described as a response to the security situation in the country's Far East. It is recognized that the region's concentration of population and infrastructure along its southern fringe makes it close to indefensible – especially since almost all major transport links there at some point pass within artillery range of the Chinese border. This situation, and the limited options available to Russia to defend this territory, contributes to the strong relative weight accorded to the role of tactical nuclear weapons as a deterrent in Russian military thinking.[119] But more recent loose talk of nuclear confrontation with the West, along with directly intimidatory messaging such as the November 2015 broadcast of supposedly classified designs for a 'dirty bomb' nuclear torpedo,[120] adds a new dimension that demands close study.

According to NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow:

> NATO has been taking Russia's nuclear threats quite seriously for some time and has also been preparing countermeasures, including ways to pre-empt Russian use of small scale tactical nuclear weapons, which Russia might consider as a strategy to end the war on Russian terms while avoiding an all-out nuclear war.[121]

At the same time, the limited availability of NSNW in Europe constrains responses to Russian potential use, and this lack of a direct answer encourages Russian posturing and threats.

[115] The doctrine, concepts and approach behind Russia's current nuclear rhetoric are the subject of another proposed future Chatham House study.
[116] Bettina Renz and Rod Thornton, 'Russian military modernization: cause, course and consequences', *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 59, No. 1, 2012, pp. 44–54.
[117] Konstantin Sivkov, quoted in Gregory P. Lannon, 'Russia's New Look Army Reforms and Russian Foreign Policy', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2011, pp. 26–54.
[118] Speaker at seminar on 'Russian Security: Facing a 21st Century of Instability', Chatham House, London, 27 February 2015. Also Roy Allison, speaking in May 2015.
[119] Seminar on 'Russia's Strategic Overhaul', Chatham House, London, 16 December 2013.
[120] For a useful summary and deconstruction of this event, see Steven Pifer, 'Is Putin's Half-Baked "Secret" Super-Nuke Torpedo For Real?', *Newsweek*, 27 November 2015, http://europe.newsweek.com/putins-half-baked-secret-super-nuke-torpedo-real-398852.
[121] Speaking at the Lennart Meri Conference, Tallinn, 26 April 2015.

Another factor continuing to encourage intimidatory rhetoric from Moscow is the lack of institutional memory in the West, which facilitates the regular repetition of the same threats. A classic case is the regular threat of deployment of Russian Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad or locations close to Russia's western borders in response to any development in Europe of which Russia disapproves. According to Poland's former deputy prime minister and minister of defence, Tomasz Siemoniak, reports of Iskander deployments 'are a lot like the Loch Ness Monster [...] they pop up from time to time'.[122] These announcements cost Russia nothing, since in common with the deployment of advanced air defence systems, they are part of a long-planned programme. Yet they invariably receive a gratifying response in the form of substantial Western media attention, and so continue to be repeated.

Military posturing also extends to threats of use of conventional ground forces against Russia's neighbours, including warnings that 'the same conditions that existed in Ukraine and caused Russia to take action there' exist in the three Baltic states.[123] Overall, Russian military messaging is baffling to its Western audience because the post-nationalist West has moved on from the Cold War mindset in which it is rooted. The result is a dangerous situation in which the messages from Russia, especially in the nuclear domain, are received but not understood.

The military outlook

As noted above, Russia's intentions have been consistent, but the military capabilities to achieve them are only now developing to the point where – at least in part – they can be used. The outlook for the Armed Forces is more of the same: further generous investment despite economic challenges, with the aim of continuing force transformation and rearmament, and of attempting to close the capability gap with potential adversaries. During 2014–15, while the structure of the Armed Forces remained relatively stable compared to the previous period of upheaval, the pace of improvement accelerated. The army prepared itself for potential war not only through exercises, defence spending increases and re-equipment, but also through the invaluable operational experience gained in and near Ukraine.[124]

It has been persuasively argued that the rotation of troops from even the most obscure outposts of the army may indicate that manpower shortages are a severe limiting factor on continuing operations.[125] At the same time, such rotations ensure that operational experience is shared widely. Despite a customarily pessimistic assessment from Pavel Felgenhauer, a long-term observer of the Russian military,[126] capability continues to develop rapidly; and more importantly, the intent to use that capability appears unswayed.[127]

[122] Paul McLeary, 'Situation Report', *Foreign Policy*, 20 May 2015.
[123] Ian Johnston, 'Russia threatens to use 'nuclear force' over Crimea and the Baltic states', *Independent*, 2 April 2015, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-threatens-to-use-nuclear-force-over-crimea-and-the-baltic-states-10150565.html.
[124] Viktor Baranets, 'Семь главных военных итогов года' [The seven main military results of the year], *Komsomolskaya pravda*, 14 January 2015, http://www.kp.ru/print/26329.3/3212122/.
[125] Sutyagin, 'Russian Forces in Ukraine'. See also Aleksandr Golts, 'Russian Army Facing Big Problems in Ukraine', *Moscow Times*, 9 February 2015, http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article.php?id=515636.
[126] 'Военный эксперт Павел Фельгенгауэр — о готовности российской армии и угрозе Третьей мировой войны' [Military expert Pavel Felgenhauer – On the Readiness of the Russian Army and the Threat of a Third World War], The Village, 20 February 2015, http://www.the-village.ru/village/city/city-news/176731-army.
[127] A topic examined in detail in Stephen Blank, 'Russian Military Capabilities in Europe', forthcoming article in *World Affairs*.

Russia thus remains in a position to leverage tactical advantages to offset strategic disadvantages. By all parameters, it is substantially outweighed by the West, and even by Europe, in strategic confrontation, but this does not necessarily prevent it from using military force in Europe successfully. This is in part because of two key force multipliers: first, the political will to resort to military force, which is entirely absent among Russia's European adversaries; and second, the successful integration of other strategic tools, reflecting the new doctrinal attention to influence rather than outright destruction.

The fact that the Russian troops at work in Ukraine, and the assets deployed in Syria, are entirely unrecognizable from the forces that entered Georgia just seven years earlier caused surprise and consternation among Western defence communities that had not been paying attention. But the Ukraine campaign overall is far more than a military operation. Successful coordination of military movements and action with other measures in the political, economic and especially information domains is the result of strenuous efforts over preceding years to harness other levers of state power in the service of strategic goals.[128]

The National Defence Control Centre

Successfully bringing together the tools of power available to the Russian leadership required new capabilities: not only coordination between arms of the state, which had been noticeably deficient in previous conflicts, but also the forcing through of leadership decisions despite administrative obstacles.[129] The new Russian way of warfare, and in particular the blurred line between peace and war which is one of its defining factors, demands a whole-of-government approach (as well as whole-of-government responses from any state wishing to resist Russia). It has long been recognized that management of the information aspects of campaigns, in particular, requires 'a well-developed mechanism of state control over information policy and processes'.[130]

The new National Defence Control Centre in Moscow is intended to facilitate this coordinated approach. At the outset of the confrontation over Ukraine, the centre still appeared more a symptom and a symbol of the new approach than a distinctive new capability.[131] But by the time Russian troops and aircraft were despatched to Syria, it appeared to be functioning effectively as a key component of the military command.[132] By combining 49 military, police, economic, infrastructure and other authorities under the stewardship of the General Staff, the centre – if implemented as planned – should greatly improve Russia's speed of reaction and information exchange, assisting in honing its coordinated capabilities for hostile action still further. It may well play a role in mobilization plans – it has already been announced that private and state companies should be ready to provide the armed forces with everything they need in case of a military

[128] Monaghan, *Defibrillating the Vertikal?*
[129] Ibid.
[130] Maj-Gen V. A. Zolotarev (ed.), '*Rossiya (SSSR) v lokalnykh voynakh i voyennykh konfliktakh vtoroy poloviny XX veka*' [Russia (USSR) in local wars and armed conflicts during the second half of the twentieth century] (Moscow: Kuchkovo Pole, 2000).
[131] Julian Cooper, 'The National Defence Management Centre of the Russian Federation. A Research Note', unpublished, 18 November 2014.
[132] Conversation with NATO defence attaché to Moscow, January 2015. See also 'Расширенное заседание коллегии Министерства обороны' [An expanded meeting of the Defence Ministry Board], President of Russia, 19 December 2014, http://news.kremlin.ru/news/47257/print. The article describes 'constant combat watch' having begun in the building. This is explained further (but not much) in Yuriy Gavrilov, 'Приказ поступит из Центра' [The command will come from the Centre], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 27 October 2014, http://www.rg.ru/2014/10/27/kartapolov.html.

conflict.[133] The centre should also assist in exerting tight control over any possible conflict, potentially preventing local escalation of the kind that may have run out of control in Georgia in 2008.[134]

The system intended to provide unity of command in Moscow is not perfect, but by comparison the West has been left disoriented and confused, with opinions divided and decision-making slowed. A major contributor to this effect is Russia's capacity for waging information warfare as a strategic tool.

[133] 'Defense Minister Unveils Russia's Wartime Plan', Sputnik, 28 September 2013, http://sputniknews.com/military/20130928/183803977/Defense-Minister-Unveils-Russias-Wartime-Plan.html.
[134] Keir Giles, 'Who Gives the Orders in the New Russian Military?', NATO Defense College, March 2012, http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=324.

4. The Old Information War

> No amount of propaganda can make right something that the world knows is wrong.
> *Barack Obama, 26 March 2014*[135]

> In information warfare, the side that tells the truth loses.
> *Nikolay Bordyuzha, Secretary-General of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, 23 May 2014*[136]

Examining Russian assessments of current events makes it clear that it considers itself to be engaged in full-scale information warfare, involving not only offensive but also defensive operations – whether or not its notional adversaries initially noticed that this was happening. This is reflected in the new emphasis on information warfare in the latest Military Doctrine, approved on 26 December 2014 – although, perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the concepts recognizable from Russia's offensive action in and around Ukraine appear described in purely defensive terms of countering threats to Russia itself.[137]

Adaptation by trial and error

The current Russian practice of information warfare combines tried and tested tools of influence with a new embrace of modern technology and capabilities. Some underlying objectives, and some guiding principles, are broadly recognizable as reinvigorated aspects of subversion campaigns from the Cold War era and earlier.[138] But their recognition as such, not only by Western societies but also by their leaderships, has been slow. In Russian terms, campaigns of this sort are 'not new, but old and well forgotten'.

This is due to two main factors. First, there is a collective lack of institutional memory among target audiences – a significant proportion of which had not even been born when Soviet subversion was a concern. Second, Russia has invested hugely in enabling factors to adapt the principles of subversion to the internet age.

These new Russian investments cover three main areas:

- Both internally and externally focused media with a substantial online presence, of which RT is the best-known but only one example;

[135] 'Full Transcript: President Obama gives speech addressing Europe, Russia on March 26', *Washington Post*, 26 March 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/transcript-president-obama-gives-speech-addressing-europe-russia-on-march-26/2014/03/26/07ae80ae-b503-11e3-b899-20667de76985_story.html.
[136] 'Moscow Conference on International Security 2014: The Plenary Speeches and Panels', Valdai Club, 6 June 2014, http://valdaiclub.com/blogs/69342.html.
[137] 'Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation', approved 26 December 2014, http://news.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf.
[138] Victor Madeira, 'Haven't We Been Here Before?', Institute of Statecraft, 30 July 2014, http://www.statecraft.org.uk/research/russian-subversion-havent-we-been-here; 'Soviet Propaganda In Western Europe', UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, March 1982, http://www.psywar.org/radSovietPropaganda.php.

- Use of social media and online forums as a force multiplier to ensure Russian narratives achieve broad reach and penetration; and

- Language skills, in order to engage with target audiences on a broad front in their own language.[139]

How this came about, and how Russian capability developed to a point that has taken its targets entirely by surprise, is more easily understood by looking at three distinct stages in the evolution of the current Russian approach.[140] Each of these stages involved Russia taking action that was unpopular either at home or abroad, and subsequently realizing that it could no longer influence the global narrative about that action in the same way that the Soviet Union could – that the old levers and tools for manipulating global opinion were either unavailable or inoperative, and that something new needed to be done. In each case, the resulting shock to the Russian system led to a distinctive response which has shaped today's impressive information warfare capability.

Chechnya, 1999

In the Second Chechen War, Russia successfully addressed the failure to dominate the traditional media environment that had proved a strategic challenge in the previous campaign to subdue Chechnya five years before.[141] The Russian authorities initially shut off independent reporting, and thereafter took substantive measures to ensure that television and newspaper reporters only filed approved reports from the battlefield, in order to shape both domestic and international perception of the conflict.[142] But officials then realized with dismay that in information terms, they were still outmanoeuvred by a notionally weaker and less capable enemy that was more adept at use of the newly arrived internet, where 'even a small and relatively impoverished adversary could achieve information dominance over a stronger opponent'.[143] Despite the fact that the war appeared to have begun with an unprovoked invasion of a Russian republic by jihadist forces from Chechnya, in global media Russia found itself incapable of overcoming the adversary narrative of Russian aggression against heroic Chechen freedom fighters.[144]

The Russian response was twofold. On the one hand, the experience served to reinforce the consistent message from the security services, led by the Federal Security Service (FSB), that the internet was a dangerous destabilizing factor and a threat to national security, public access to which should be carefully controlled. (In 1996, Russia had faced a strategic choice of whether to embrace or reject the internet. At parliamentary hearings entitled 'Russia and the Internet: The Choice of a Future', the internet *as a whole* was characterized as a threat to Russian national

[139] As reflected, for instance, in complaints over lack of language capacity to influence non-Russian-speaking audiences in the Baltic states. See 'Информационные войны с самими собой' [Information wars with themselves], Postimees-DZD, 7 November 2011, http://rus.postimees.ee/624820/informacionnye-vojny-s-samimi-soboj. See also Greg Simons, 'Perception of Russia's soft power and influence in the Baltic States', *Public Relations Review*, 2014, http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0363811114001623.
[140] For another assessment of the development of modern Russian information warfare from its historical roots, see Mariia Zaitseva, 'Information and security components of the Russian foreign policy', *Informacijos mokslai*, No. 70, 2014, pp. 58–68.
[141] Timothy L. Thomas, 'Information Warfare in the Second (1999-Present) Chechen War: Motivator for Military Reform?', in Anne C. Aldis and Roger N. McDermott (eds), *Russian Military Reform 1992-2002* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 209–33.
[142] Timothy L. Thomas, 'Manipulating the Mass Consciousness: Russian & Chechen "Information War" Tactics in the Second Chechen-Russian Conflict', in Anne Aldis (ed.), *The Second Chechen War*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, June 2000.
[143] Roland Heickerö, 'Emerging Cyber Threats and Russian Views on Information Warfare and Information Operations', Swedish Defence Research Agency, March 2010, pp. 15–16.
[144] Graeme P. Herd, *Information Warfare & the Second Chechen Campaign*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, 2000.

security by Vladimir Markomenko, first deputy director general of the Federal Agency of Government Communications and Information (FAPSI), the security body at the time responsible for cyber affairs.)[145] At the same time, the security services themselves continued to develop their own means and methods of exploiting the new medium to target adversaries abroad.

Georgia, 2008

The armed conflict in Georgia resulted in a convincing military victory for Russia, but at the same time exposed serious deficiencies in its military performance. Dismay at conventional military failings was accompanied by a failure to agree on who had won the information war – but there was a strong consensus that major reform was needed to improve military capability in this field as well as many others.[146] A stark contrast was noted between Georgia's president, Mikheil Saakashvili, speaking to Western audiences directly in their own languages (while sitting in front of an entirely misplaced EU flag), and Russia's own belated and stilted attempts at organizing press conferences led by the monolingual and uninspiring deputy chief of the General Staff, Anatoliy Nogovitsyn.

The result, among other recommendations for overhauling the Russian Armed Forces, included calls for the creation of Information Troops, a dedicated branch that could manage the information war from within the military.[147] Reflecting the holistic and full-spectrum nature of the Russian information war concept, these troops would include hackers, journalists, specialists in strategic communications and psychological operations, and, crucially, linguists to overcome Russia's now perceived language capability deficit. This combination of skills would enable the Information Troops to engage with target audiences on a broad front, since for information warfare objectives 'the use of "mass information armies" conducting a direct dialogue with people on the internet is more effective than a "mediated" dialogue between the leaders of states and the peoples of the world'.[148]

In the event, no formed unit known as Information Troops materialized in the Russian order of battle. The notion of the military handling large-scale offensive cyber operations appeared to be publicly squashed by the FSB, and the other capabilities referred to began to develop elsewhere.[149]

Moscow, 2011

Three years later, protest movements both in Russia and abroad caused a further refining of the approach to information warfare. The Arab Spring demonstrated the power of social media to mobilize and organize, to the extent of facilitating regime change – causing deep alarm at the prospect of this being applied to Russia. Meanwhile, at home the election protests of 2011–12 saw

[145] State Duma proceedings, 17 December 1996. See also Andrei Soldatov, 'Fapsi—obshestvennosti: "menshe znaesh — krepche spish"' [FAPSI to the public: the less you know, the sounder you sleep], *Segodnya*, 12 December 1999.
[146] Timothy L. Thomas, 'Russian Information Warfare Theory: The Consequences of August 2008', in Stephen J. Blank and Richard Weitz (eds), *The Russian Military Today and Tomorrow: Essays In Memory of Mary Fitzgerald*, US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2010, pp. 265–99.
[147] Keir Giles, 'Information Troops – A Russian Cyber Command?', Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Cyber Conflict, Tallinn, June 2011.
[148] P. Koayesov, 'Theatre of Warfare on Distorting Airwaves. Georgia Versus South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the Field of Media Abuse. Fighting by Their Own Rules', *Voyennyy Vestnik Yuga Rossii*, 18 January 2009.
[149] The shifting fortunes of the Russian army's Electronic Warfare Troops (Voyska REB) as a potential candidate for the role of 'Information Troops' can be traced through Ulrik Franke, 'War by Non-Military Means: Understanding Russian Information Warfare', Swedish Defence Research Agency, March 2015, http://www.foi.se/ReportFiles/foir_4065.pdf.

government attempts to use automated systems to dominate or suppress online debate, or divert or disrupt social media as a facilitator for organization.[150] A large array of pre-positioned Twitterbots and sporadic but highly targeted distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks were combined with old-fashioned dirty tricks against opposition leadership figures to attempt to defuse and discredit the protest movement.

The response to the protests marked a major step forward in Russia's learning to use means of online mass communication.[151] Examination of the results appears to have reinforced the conclusion that automated systems are simply not sufficient, and that dominating mass consciousness online requires the engagement of actual humans.[152] This led to intense investment in human capabilities to direct or prevent online debate and comment.[153] This capability, which had previously had only limited targeting and mostly within Russia,[154] was bolstered by the recruitment or training of foreign-language speakers (at varying degrees of capability) to exploit the hyperconnected nature of online space. Meanwhile, the recruitment of staff for online media saw journalists tempted from their work with traditional media by offers of doubled or tripled salaries. Thus parts of the original Information Troops concept morphed into the 'Kremlin troll army', in cooperation with state-backed media with a strong internet presence.[155] Automation and machine generation of social media posts and information, while tested and found not to be a complete solution, was nevertheless incorporated in the overall strategy with its own specific role.

By 2014, the media element of Russian information campaigns displayed close coordination of messaging with centralized direction,[156] as well as an impressive range of alternative outlets to address all sectors of the target audience. RT (formerly Russia Today), Sputnik, Russia Direct and others each tailored their level of sophistication of argument – and the extent to which they concealed their propaganda function through subtle imitations of objectivity – to the expectations of their intended readers and viewers, facilitated by the willingness of unscrupulous or deluded native speakers to serve the Kremlin against the interests of their own nations, whether as editors, correspondents or interviewees.[157] In this way, the media effort reflected the way in which the troll army adopts a different approach for different forums, ranging from simple abuse, through confusion with half-truths, to sophisticated argument.

[150] Markku Lonkila, *Russian Protest On- And Offline: The Role Of Social Media In The Moscow Opposition Demonstrations In December 2011*, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, February 2012.
[151] See also Margarita Jaitner, 'Exercising Power in Social Media', in Jari Rantapelkonen and Mirva Salminen (eds), *The Fog of Cyberwar* (Helsinki: Finnish National Defence University, 2013), http://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/88689/The%20Fog%20of%20Cyber%20Defence%20NDU%202013.pdf?sequence=1.
[152] See, for instance, Igor Elkov, 'Короткая память' [A Short Memory], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 17 January 2013, http://www.rg.ru/2013/01/17/ashmanov.html; and 'Profilaktika' [Prevention], Mayak, 25 December 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yhOKf0J280.
[153] As described in 'Городской типаж: блогер-пропагандист' [The Urban Character: A Propagandist-Blogger], Sobaka, 28 January 2015, http://www.sobaka.ru/city/city/32942/; and Aleksandra Garmazhapova, 'Где живут тролли. Как работают интернет-провокаторы в Санкт-Петербурге и кто ими заправляет' [Where the trolls live. How internet-provocateurs work in St. Petersburg and who controls them], *Novaya gazeta*, 9 September 2013.
[154] Julien Nocetti, *'Digital Kremlin': Power and the Internet in Russia*, Institut Français des Relations Internationales, April 2011, pp. 16–17.
[155] Max Seddon, 'Documents Show How Russia's Troll Army Hit America', BuzzFeed, 2 June 2014, http://www.buzzfeed.com/maxseddon/documents-show-how-russias-troll-army-hit-america; 'Analysis of Russia's Information Campaign Against Ukraine', NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, p. 28 onwards.
[156] '"Anonymous International" Leaks Kremlin's Instructions to Russian TV', Global Voices, 28 March 2014, http://globalvoicesonline.org/2014/03/28/anonymous-international-leaks-kremlins-instructions-to-russian-tv/; Stephen Castle, 'A Russian TV Insider Describes a Modern Propaganda Machine', *New York Times*, 13 February 2015, http://nyti.ms/1zcDqDq. See also Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing Is True And Everything Is Possible* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014).
[157] Miriam Elder, 'Russia Has A New Propaganda Outlet And It's Everything You Thought It Would Be', BuzzFeed, 10 November 2014, http://www.buzzfeed.com/miriamelder/russia-has-a-new-propaganda-outlet-and-its-everything-you-th; 'George Galloway Doubles Pay Packet With Appearances On Russia Today And Al-Mayadeen', Huffington Post, 11 July 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/07/11/george-galloway-russia-today_n_5577661.html.

It should be emphasized that the Russian information campaigns visible to an English-language audience are only part of a broad front covering multiple languages, including not only state-backed media and trolling, but also 'false flag' media – sock puppet websites set up to resemble genuine news outlets, but seeding their news feeds with false or contentious reporting that ties in with Russian narratives.[158] The 'false flag' approach extends to RT determinedly masquerading as a US broadcaster, and to clone accounts on social media set up to mimic and discredit genuine Western media outlets.[159]

Success or failure?

While Ukraine is the topic that has brought the Russian information offensive to broad attention, other well-established targeted campaigns have been running for much longer – as, for example, in the Baltic states, where Russian-backed media companies and their broadcasting services work in lockstep with the Russian political authorities.[160] But Western media organizations more broadly, as well as the populations they serve, were entirely unprepared in early 2014 for a targeted and consistent hostile information campaign organized and resourced at state level.[161] The result was an initial startling success for the Russian approach – exemplified in Crimea, where reports from journalists on the scene identifying Russian troops did not reach mainstream audiences because editors in their newsrooms were baffled by the inexplicable Russian denials.[162] As one assessment put it in early 2015: 'In theory, the West should be able to defeat Russia decisively in the so-called information war regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and before that, of Georgia. In practice, however, the West [...] decided not to fight at all.'[163]

This led at first to striking success in penetration of narratives, which contributed powerfully to Russia's ability to prosecute operations against Ukraine in the early stages of the conflict with little coordinated opposition from the West. The fact that the EU continued to find itself unable to refer publicly to the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine for almost a year denoted a broader inability to challenge the Russian version of events – without which a meaningful response was impossible.[164] Early media coverage of the conflict made it 'apparent, in short, that some interlocutors had swallowed whole some of the cruder falsifications of Russian propaganda'.[165]

[158] Dalibor Rohac, 'Cranks, Trolls, and Useful Idiots: Russia's information warriors set their sights on Central Europe', *Foreign Policy*, 12 March 2015, https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/12/cranks-trolls-and-useful-idiots-poland-czech-republic-slovakia-russia-ukraine/. These fake media are also prone to launching personal attacks on critics of Russia, including this author. For an example of fairly low-level sniping compared to the continuing and vicious *ad hominem* attacks on more visible commentators, see '20 minuten.ch diffamiert Kritiker als Putin gesteuert' [20 minuten.ch vilifies critics as controlled by Putin], *Schweiz Magazin*, 5 June 2014, http://www.schweizmagazin.ch/nachrichten/schweiz/19717-minutench-diffamiert-Kritiker-als-Putin-gesteuert.html.
[159] Jill Dougherty, 'Russian TV's American Face', Huffington Post, 11 April 2014. See also 'Full Transcript: Mikhail Kasyanov and Anissa Naouai', CNN, 21 November 2014, http://amanpour.blogs.cnn.com/2014/11/21/full-transcript-mikhail-kasyanov-and-anissa-naouai/; and 'Clone Twitter Accounts Target RFE/RL', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 17 February 2015, http://www.rferl.org/content/clone-twitter-accounts-target-rferl/26853959.html.
[160] 'The Influence of Russian Media Companies on Social and Political Processes', in Mike Winnerstig (ed.), *Tools of Destabilization: Russian Soft Power and Non-military Influence in the Baltic States*, Swedish Defence Research Agency report FOI-R--3990--SE, December 2014.
[161] Nick Cohen, 'Russia Today: why western cynics lap up Putin's TV poison', *Observer*, 8 November 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/08/russia-today-western-cynics-lap-up-putins-tv-poison.
[162] Lucy Ash, 'How Russia outfoxes its enemies', BBC News, 29 January 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-31020283.
[163] Matthew Bryza, 'ICDS Director Bryza on Why The West Is Losing The Information War with Russia', International Centre for Defence and Security, 27 February 2015, http://www.icds.ee/icds-in-media/article/icds-director-bryza-on-why-the-west-is-losing-the-information-war-with-russia-for-pism-in-warsaw/.
[164] Andrew Rettman, 'EU breaks taboo on "Russian forces in Ukraine"', EUobserver, 16 February 2015, https://euobserver.com/foreign/127667.
[165] Besemeres, 'Russian disinformation and Western misconceptions'.

This initial inability to report the presence of Russian troops was in sharp contrast to reporting on conflicts in previous decades. During the 1980s, Western news media were able to report the facts of Soviet troop deployments to Syria[166] and Angola,[167] among others, entirely untroubled by the denials from Moscow. But in 2014, effective Russian information campaigning combined with a general lack of threat perception among Western media to ensure success in creating confusion and ambiguity.

By the end of 2014, Western media outlets were still faithfully reporting Russian disinformation as fact, but the realization that they had been subjected to a concerted campaign of subversion was beginning to filter through into reporting. In traditional media (including their online versions), this was evidenced in the closure or moderation of previously open-access discussion boards and the rolling back of user-generated content. References to social media as sources were also curtailed in the face of concerted troll offensives. Paradoxically, one of the first major news outlets to take these steps to suppress comment was the *Guardian* in the United Kingdom – previously a bastion of liberal extremism and freedom of expression, to the extent that at the height of the Snowden controversy, its editors viewed themselves as the self-appointed arbiters of whether the publication of stolen classified information was in the national interest.

One assessment of this change is that Russian information campaigns are failing. By Western criteria, this may be true – to an informed observer Russian disinformation often appears clumsy, counterproductive, obvious and easily debunked. This gave rise to a dangerous optimism about the effectiveness of Russian measures, and to a widespread assumption that Russian disinformation was failing because of its lack of plausibility.[168] Another widely held view is that Russian fabrications and denials are ineffective because they are so obvious that they do not confuse senior, or intelligent, individuals in the West.

But assessing the campaigns by these standards presents a significant risk of misinterpreting their objectives as a result of mirroring – projecting our own assumptions and criteria onto decision-makers in Moscow. In particular, this led initially to underestimating the effects of layered messaging, of more subtle campaigning screened and concealed by the obvious, of continued saturation, and the pernicious effect of the 'filter bubble' on online reading habits – the way personalized search results driven by advertising models can effectively isolate internet users from alternative information and viewpoints.[169] This approach also failed to account for the initial lack of visibility on disinformation and hostile propaganda being disseminated not only in European languages, but also in Arabic and Russian, targeting minorities in European nations.

Measured by Russian criteria instead, the information campaign has in fact made substantial achievements. This is particularly the case in two key areas: internally, controlling the domestic

[166] Amid extensive reporting, for a parallel with deployments in 2015 see, for example, 'Weinberger Calls Soviet Manning Of Missiles in Syria "Very Serious"', *New York Times*, 1 March 1983.
[167] A wide range of media reports from the period are referenced in Stuart Sterzel, 'South Africa and the Angola War', forthcoming publication.
[168] As, for instance, Lawrence Freedman: 'Efforts at deception were by and large ineffectual, as the Russian role became progressively transparent.' Lawrence Freedman, 'Ukraine and the Art of Limited War', *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 56, No. 6, 2014, pp. 7–38.
[169] The 'filter bubble' effect derives from news feed selections offering more of a given source if the reader selects it, since clicks drive advertising revenue. The result is to turn internet media into an echo chamber for the reader's own views, and can lead to seeing exclusively RT or Sputnik or Lifenews coverage via social media like Facebook. See 'How to Burst the "Filter Bubble" that Protects Us from Opposing Views', *MIT Technology Review*, 29 November 2013, http://www.technologyreview.com/view/522111/how-to-burst-the-filter-bubble-that-protects-us-from-opposing-views/.

media environment; and externally, influencing mass consciousness, and creating an environment in which it is hard to distinguish quality information, in order to undermine the objectivity of Western media reporting and hence influence the information available to policy-makers. Together, these form a combined defensive and offensive strategy working through both domestic and external media.[170]

Defensive measures

To use its own doctrinal jargon, Russia has succeeded in 'securing its national information space', and 'preventing breaches' in it.[171] In other words, the population has been effectively isolated from sources of information other than those which follow the Kremlin line.[172] This isolation is not total and hermetic – it is still possible for interested Russians to access foreign media if they wish. But recent clampdowns on foreign media operations in Russia, combined with the withdrawal of rebroadcasting licences, tighter restraints on internet usage, and the acquisition of control over media companies by Kremlin-friendly individuals,[173] have made that process far harder than it was just a year ago.[174] In other words, if you are living in Russia, finding genuine alternative sources of news now takes effort.

Russia has undertaken a range of effective measures to insulate itself from scrutiny by its own population. These include specific methods of isolating Russians from external sources of information – putting in place both overt and covert elements of what Daniel Schearf, Moscow bureau chief for Voice Of America, describes as a new 'media Iron Curtain'.[175] This leaves the domestic information space entirely dominated by state media, with central direction of the news agenda put in place long before operations in Ukraine.[176] The result is an unrecognizable Russian alternative reality,[177] in which:

> … the Russian media, with very few exceptions, have abandoned, sometimes through coercion, but mostly voluntarily and even eagerly, their mission of informing the public and have turned into creators of the Matrix-like artificial reality where imaginary heroes and villains battle tooth and nail in Russia's Armageddon.[178]

What remains of Russia's free media has largely been either marginalized or intimidated into compliance.[179] The result is broad acceptance of the alternative reality provided by state media, and

[170] Matthew Armstrong, 'Russia's War on Information', War on the Rocks, December 2014, http://warontherocks.com/2014/12/russias-war-on-information/.
[171] For an examination of the sometimes unexpected meanings of Russian information warfare terms, see Keir Giles with William Hagestad, *Divided by a Common Language: Cyber Definitions in Chinese, Russian and English*, NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, June 2012.
[172] See also the extensive review of this process by Jill Dougherty, 'How the Media Became One of Putin's Most Powerful Weapons', *The Atlantic*, 21 April 2015, http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/04/how-the-media-became-putins-most-powerful-weapon/391062/.
[173] 'Russian media firms: Interesting news', *The Economist*, 8 November 2014, http://www.economist.com/node/21631057/print.
[174] Armstrong, 'Russia's War on Information'.
[175] Conversation with author, August 2015.
[176] Castle, 'A Russian TV Insider Describes a Modern Propaganda Machine'.
[177] Gary Shteyngart, 'Out of My Mouth Comes Unimpeachable Manly Truth', *New York Times*, 18 February 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/22/magazine/out-of-my-mouth-comes-unimpeachable-manly-truth.html.
[178] Vasily Gatov, 'How the Kremlin and the Media Ended Up in Bed Together', *Moscow Times*, 11 March 2015, http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/how-the-kremlin-and-the-media-ended-up-in-bed-together/517323.html.
[179] Andrei Malgin, 'Russia's State Media Get Away With Murder', *Moscow Times*, 4 November 2014, http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/russia-s-state-media-get-away-with-murder/510619.html. See also 'Russian media firms: Interesting news', *The Economist*.

a resultant state of collective delusion, voluntary or otherwise, among ordinary Russians.[180] This represents a success for the state security structures, which have consistently warned of the dangers of free information exchange and of Russia's vulnerability to hostile information campaigns.[181] Information control is tightened by measures such as censoring unapproved school textbooks, so that Russians develop an alternate vision not only of current events but also of history.[182]

As a result, another optimistic assessment of the failure of Russian information campaigns, namely that they are doomed by obvious contradictions between domestic and external narratives, also fails to apply in current circumstances. This is not only because of the lack of visibility of the foreign narratives domestically, but also because of a distinctive attitude that Russian media campaigns display towards the notion of truth and credibility, to be discussed further below.

The exception that proves the rule is social media. As has been demonstrated repeatedly throughout the seizure of Crimea and operations in eastern Ukraine, the ability of journalists and ordinary citizens – as well as Russian servicemen themselves – to directly reach a wide audience with information that undermines or contradicts the official line poses the single greatest challenge to Russia's information campaigns. Recognition that social media constitute 'influencing factors causing a considerable shift in the balance of power within conflicts'[183] has led to recent suppressive measures targeting such media within Russia in an attempt to control this last unregulated subset of 'national information space'.[184] In addition, the key role of television in influencing Russian society is well documented, and recent research confirms the driving role of this government-controlled medium in forming opinion even on the (relatively) free internet.[185]

Offensive measures

Alternative realities have also been presented to audiences outside Russia, where liberal societies and free media provide weaknesses ready for exploitation by a coordinated information warfare onslaught.[186]

Western societies put faith in their own independent media to arrive at and report the truth thanks to their relative freedom of action. But Western liberal media training proved initially to be no match for the unity of message emanating from Russia. In fact, the opposite was true: the emphasis on balance in many Western media ensured that Russian narratives, no matter how patently fraudulent, were repeated to European and American audiences by their own media, and thus validated and reinforced. The balance imperative resulted in news editors rigidly following the dictum that there must be two sides to every story, even in those cases where in reality there was

[180] Shteyngart, 'Out of My Mouth Comes Unimpeachable Manly Truth'; Malgin, 'Russia's State Media Get Away With Murder'.
[181] See, for instance, Yuri A. Derbin, 'Invasion: How Could It Be?', *Voyennaya Mysl'*, No. 4, July 2001, pp. 64–69. For a detailed overview of how this persistent attitude by the security services now dictates how the Russian internet is governed and owned, see Andrey Soldatov and Irina Borogan, *The Red Web* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2015).
[182] Sasha Mordovets and Steven Lee Myers, 'Putin's Friend Profits in Purge of Schoolbooks', *New York Times*, 1 November 2014, http://mobile.nytimes.com/2014/11/02/world/europe/putins-friend-profits-in-purge-of-schoolbooks.html.
[183] Thorsten Hochwald, 'How Do Social Media Affect Intra-State Conflicts other than War?', *Connections*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, Summer 2013, p. 9.
[184] Keir Giles, 'As sanctions bite, could Russia isolate itself by switching off the net?', *The World Today*, November 2014.
[185] Christina Cottiero, Katherine Kucharski, Evgenia Olimpieva and Robert W. Orttung, 'War of words: the impact of Russian state television on the Russian Internet', *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, March 2015.
[186] Cohen, 'Russia Today'.

only one.[187] As noted in a BBC report on information campaigns, 'the common idea that there will always be two opposing views does not always result in a rational conclusion. [...] This "balance routine" [makes it possible ...] to claim that there are two sides to every story, that "experts disagree" – creating a false picture of the truth.'[188]

Nevertheless, when presented with a consistent version of events being repeated by all levels of the Russian media machine from the president to the lowliest foot soldier in the Kremlin troll army, Western news editors had little choice but to report it – hence lending that version weight and authority. Similarly, when Russian state-owned media outlets can pay for space in foreign newspapers, including distributing 'Russia Beyond The Headlines' supplements on their behalf,[189] this gives a tacit validation to their content.

Amid a wide range of Russian media outlets for external consumption, which are tailored by audience and sophistication, RT (formerly Russia Today) plays the most visible role. Recognition that RT 'acts as a corrosive, anti-systemic force'[190] – despite apparently limited viewer numbers, in the United Kingdom in particular[191] – has not resulted in any publicly released, detailed survey that seeks to measure the impact of this or other Russian media outlets for foreign consumption. Concern at their penetration and effectiveness remains based on reports not for public release, ad hoc assessments by journalists, or the author's own broad collection of anecdotal evidence from the United Kingdom and United States.[192] But the key criterion in judging their effectiveness has to be the results: examples of successful penetration of Russian narratives into foreign decision-making environments, like the ones introduced in the section entitled 'Consequences' below.

At the time of writing, recognition by individual Western media that their objectivity and independence are being subverted by Russian disinformation and troll campaigns[193] has not generally translated into a coordinated response. In particular, the requirement for editorial balance still presents a key challenge. As a result of this requirement, for example, even a report by a respected diplomatic correspondent explaining the nature of 'hybrid warfare' needs to include six paragraphs of Russian denial, claiming that the whole concept is a fabrication intended to discredit Russia.[194]

Here, too, the internet and social media have played a distinctive role. The Russian troll army, interacting directly with readerships in a range of forums including online discussion boards, Twitter and more, has acted as a force multiplier for driving home the Russian message, especially by diverting or suppressing any debate that has sought to highlight the inconsistencies or implausibilities of the Russian version of events. In addition to this use of trolling as a blunt

[187] As explored in a Norwegian context by Kjell Dragnes in 'Journalister i propagandaens tid' [Journalists in the time of propaganda], *Aftenposten*, 23 March 2015, http://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/Journalister-i-propagandaens-tid-7954103.html.
[188] Georgina Kenyon, 'The man who studies the spread of ignorance', BBC, 6 January 2016, http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20160105-the-man-who-studies-the-spread-of-ignorance.
[189] The huge range of this distribution is evident from the collected online versions of these supplements. See http://rbth.co.uk/e-paper.
[190] Edward Lucas, 'Russia's Information Warfare', Politico Europe, 6 November 2014, http://www.politico.eu/article/russias-information-warfare/.
[191] See Broadcasters' Audience Research Board Viewing Summary, http://www.barb.co.uk/whats-new/weekly-viewing-summary.
[192] 'Kremlin's Media Strategies in the West', in *Bringing Plurality and Balance to the Russian Language Media Space,* European Endowment for Democracy, 2015; 'The World According to Russia Today', The Frontline Club, 13 March 2015, http://www.frontlineclub.com/uk-premiere-the-world-according-to-russia-today-qa/.
[193] Chris Elliot, 'The readers' editor on... pro-Russia trolling below the line on Ukraine stories', *Guardian,* 4 May 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/04/pro-russia-trolls-ukraine-guardian-online.
[194] Kendall, 'Hybrid warfare'.

instrument, the effect can also on occasion be subtle and indirect – by creating an atmosphere and an impression of consensus, rather than pushing a single direct and obvious lie. This leaves free media unsure whether the sway of opinion reflected in their correspondence or comments pages is genuine and should be publicized, catered for or reflected in coverage.[195]

Russia achieves further successes in suppressing dissent when the social media outlets themselves can be induced to silence opposing voices, as in January 2016 when the use of mass bots posting automated complaints led to the blocking of pro-Ukrainian accounts on Twitter – an incident which, together with the earlier deletion of accounts parodying Russian media outlets, undermined earlier confidence in Twitter as a free and open medium where Russian disinformation could be challenged and countered.[196]

Taken together, measures like these augment the scale, intensity, volume and consistency of the Russian arguments online. Consequently they exacerbate the Western media problem of favouring balance over objectivity, and can result in reporting being further skewed by taking into account the entirely false, but ubiquitous, Russian alternate narrative.

By comparison with the pre-internet era, the effective seeding of disinformation is now vastly simpler. Noisy and unsubtle exploits such as hacking the Twitter feed of a major news agency to plant disinformation have taken place,[197] but even these are unnecessary when stories can be introduced into the media by other, seemingly natural and legitimate, means.

Major commercial news media outlets in Western countries have made substantial cuts in reporting staff as advertising revenue has bled away to other media, and few of the numerous amateur blogs and forums which have sprung up have the capacity for serious source validation on their own. Consequently, 'sock puppet' websites which appear to provide or aggregate news can achieve substantial reach and penetration. Once the disinformation placed there has been fed into the mainstream news flow at one or more points, and is picked up and reported by reputable traditional media whose editors and reporters are not aware of its origins, others will follow. Even in the new climate of awareness, the major media do not wish to be left behind on a story which has made it to the news agenda. Crucially, part of the definition of success for a disinformation campaign is that most or all of the media outlets reporting it will not know that it is disinformation – and will therefore fiercely defend their right to report it.

The defensive and offensive aspects of the Russian disinformation campaign illustrate a key reason why its success or failure should not be judged by criteria set elsewhere than in Moscow. The widespread assessment that Russia is failing in its objectives continues to emphasize the implausibility of its narratives and the consequent assumption that they will be rejected by their

[195] The effectiveness of this approach is evidenced by a senior correspondent for a respected British national newspaper still saying in April 2015 that the large numbers of emails, comments and responses received through social media that were in support of Russian policy were indicative of a real groundswell of opinion among the paper's UK readership.
[196] Sergij Petrov, 'Mass Blocking of the Ukrainian Users Twitter Accounts start Russian Operation "Brotherly Peoples"', Maidan, 10 January 2016, http://world.maidan.org.ua/2016/mass-blocking-twitter-operation-brotherly-peoples; 'Twitter массово банит проукраинские аккаунты' [Twitter puts a mass ban on pro-Ukrainian accounts], Korrespondent.net, 8 January 2016, http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/3612512-Twitter-massovo-banyt-proukraynskye-akkaunty.
[197] 'AP Twitter hack causes panic on Wall Street and sends Dow plunging', *Guardian*, 23 April 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/business/2013/apr/23/ap-tweet-hack-wall-street-freefall.

audience. But while respect for the facts is a fundamental requirement of Western communications strategies, Russian campaigns need not even remotely resemble the truth to be successful.

Domestically, there is no challenge to the Kremlin narrative now that independent media have been effectively removed from the marketplace.[198] Russians who do not deliberately seek out alternative sources of information are more likely to accept what they are being told about their own country and the outside world. Abroad, the Russian alternative reality need not be plausible in order to provide alternatives to the truth, since saturation coverage by Russian external media, the strictures of balance in Western media, and the efforts of the Kremlin troll army will ensure that it achieves penetration among its target audience regardless of credibility.

It must also be emphasized once again that Russian disinformation campaigns aimed at the West are conducted not only in NATO languages, but also in Arabic and Russian, targeting minorities across Europe. This has major implications for managing future confrontations between Russia and other front-line states, which must involve finding means to respond to information operations when the initiative necessarily lies with Russia.

The unimportance of truth

A primary objective of Russian disinformation campaigns is to cause confusion and doubt. The provision of multiple, contradictory alternatives to the truth serves the purpose of undermining trust in objective reporting, and especially in official statements by Russia's adversaries and victims. A key example of this approach followed the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 on 17 July 2014.[199] Four days after the event, by which time it was already clear that Russia held ultimate responsibility for the tragedy, its Ministry of Defence held a press conference to present explanations absolving Russia.[200] The scenarios presented were diverse and mutually exclusive, and did not stand up to the briefest examination by experts with even basic knowledge of the aircraft and missile systems claimed to be involved.[201]

But this was not a Russian concern: the scenarios' instant rejection by foreign and Russian experts did not prevent them from being reported in the West as well as receiving broad coverage within Russia. In the same fashion, almost four months later, when Russia issued crudely doctored satellite images suggesting that the Malaysian airliner had been downed by a missile attack from a Ukrainian aircraft, these were instantly detected as fake – but this did not prevent the claims from being reported, initially without qualification, by Western media.[202] Russian disinformation thus

[198] As described in detail in Gatov, 'How the Kremlin and the Media Ended Up in Bed Together'.
[199] Dutch investigators and prosecutors conducting the MH17 air crash investigation have been the targets of intense cyber penetration attempts by Russia; an instance of actions which the West would consider cyber operations being used by Russia for a pure information warfare aim. 'Vijf vragen over het MH17-onderzoek' [Five questions about the MH17 investigation], Nederlandse Omroep Stichting, 3 March 2015, http://nos.nl/artikel/2022540. See also Keir Giles, 'With Russia and Ukraine, is all really quiet on the cyber front?', Ars Technica, 11 March 2014, http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2014/03/with-russia-and-ukraine-is-all-really-quiet-on-the-cyber-front/.
[200] 'Special Briefing by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation on the crash of the Malaysian Boeing 777 in the Ukrainian air space, July 21, 2014', Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/ECD62987D4816CA344257D1D00251C76.
[201] See 'Alternative Theories – The Russian MoD's July 21 Press Conference', in Eliot Higgins, 'MH17 – The Open Source Evidence', Bellingcat, 8 October 2015, https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2015/10/08/mh17-the-open-source-evidence/.
[202] 'Is this the moment MH17 was shot down as it flew over Ukraine? Russian state broadcaster produces "satellite images" showing alleged fighter jet attack', *Daily Mail*, 14 November 2014, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2835088/Is-moment-MH17-shot-flew-Ukraine-Russian-state-broadcaster-produces-satellite-images-showing-fighter-jet-attack.html.

continues to reach its targets, sowing confusion and doubt abroad and obscuring the truth with a thicket of falsehoods.[203]

To dismiss the importance of Russian denials because they are implausible is also to underestimate the concept and power of the direct lie. Given the habit of leaders in democratic nations to attempt always to say something that at least resembles the truth, implausible denials are a ploy which Western media are particularly ill-equipped to respond to and report appropriately. Thus when Vladimir Putin denies that Russian troops are in Crimea or in eastern Ukraine, it is not important that what he is saying is plainly untrue – the approach is effective not only in press conferences, especially when unchallenged by a compliant media, but as then prime minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, found at the 2014 G20 summit in Brisbane, it also makes it impossible to confront or engage with Putin even when face to face.[204] Similarly, when the defence attaché at Germany's embassy in Russia returned to Moscow with photographs he had taken of Russian armour and equipment crossing the border into Ukraine and presented them to Russian Ministry of Defence officials, he was simply told that the photographs were fakes and that he had not taken them.[205]

According to NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow, Russia presents 'an endlessly changing storyline designed to obfuscate and confuse, to create the impression that there are no reliable facts and therefore no truth'. The response should be:

> deconstructing propaganda, debunking Moscow's false historical narrative [...] We cannot respond with more propaganda, but only with the truth and facts: by setting the record straight. While this takes time, credibility is our biggest asset to counter hybrid communications.[206]

The emphasis on directly countering disinformation by telling the truth reflects the widespread assessment that in order for NATO to become 'far more adept at confronting the strategic communications both Russia and ISIL use to keep NATO societies off balance', the first step is 'establishing an effective counter-narrative which calls a lie a lie', and learning 'offensive stratcom that tells people the truth'.[207]

But within the expert community, it is increasingly recognized that countering every single piece of Russian disinformation is not only labour-intensive out of all proportion to the result, but also futile. According to the US ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt:

> I don't spend much time focusing on 'Kremlin narratives.' Everyone knows the Kremlin seeks to use information to deny, deceive, and confuse – to sow seeds of doubt to provide cover for its manufactured war in eastern Ukraine. You could spend every hour of every day trying to bat down every lie, to the point where you don't achieve anything else. And that's exactly what the Kremlin wants.[208]

[203] Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, 'The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money', Interpreter, 22 November 2014, http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Menace_of_Unreality_Final.pdf.
[204] Nick Logan, '"Get out of Ukraine": Harper to Putin at G20 Summit in Brisbane', Global News, November 15, 2014, http://globalnews.ca/news/1673290/get-out-of-ukraine-harper-to-putin-at-g20-summit-in-brisbane/. As also reported by Ekho Moskvy radio, 15 November 2014.
[205] Conversation with embassy official from NATO member state, March 2015.
[206] 'Remarks by NATO Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Alexander Vershbow at the Public Diplomacy Forum 2015', NATO, 17 February 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_117556.htm.
[207] 'NATO and New Ways of Warfare', NATO Defense College.
[208] 'Interview: U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt on Euromaidan, Ukrainian reforms and Kremlin trolls', *Business Ukraine*, 5 December 2015, http://bunews.com.ua/interviews/item/interview-us-ambassador-geoffrey-pyatt-on-euromaidan-ukrainian-reforms-and-kremlin-trolls.

Integrity remains fundamental for NATO and for Western liberal democracies. But the principle of countering items of disinformation head on with truth has a further obstacle to overcome if it is to be effective in rebutting Russian narratives in mass consciousness. This is because the multiple evident untruths referred to by Vershbow are in part designed to undermine trust in the existence of objective truth, whether from media or from official sources. This contributes to eroding the comparative advantages of liberal democratic societies when seeking to counter disinformation, by neutralizing the advantages associated with credibility.[209]

On occasion this approach can express itself in direct attack on trusted Western media outlets, for example RT programming suggesting that BBC reporting is faked.[210] The aim is not necessarily to convince audiences that Russia is telling the truth, but that all information is untrustworthy.

This is a distinctly Russian approach. In April 2015, Aleksey Levinson of Russia's Levada Centre polling organization presented research which underscored the very different Russian attitude to truth in politics.[211] Asked whether the Russian authorities were telling the truth about there being no Russian troops in Ukraine, 37 per cent of those polled said yes. Another 38 per cent said no, but that 'in the current international situation it was correct for Russia to deny this'. This provides explicit acknowledgment that the Russian public backs its leaders in making statements that they do not expect will be believed. Indeed by early 2016, some Russian official statements appeared to have entirely abandoned any concern for credibility. While Moscow was angrily denying that it was using unguided munitions in airstrikes in Syria, the Ministry of Defence was proudly releasing images and video of Russian aircraft doing precisely that.[212]

Russian official sources continue to disseminate lies that are easily detected and discredited in the West, as with the striking example of the 'discovery' of supposed US man-portable air-defence systems (MANPADS) in Donetsk in July 2015.[213] But the implausibility is irrelevant for Russian objectives: the story has been planted and will continue to be disseminated via the internet, and will not be contradicted in mainstream sources within Russia.

This reinforces the point that instead of convincing Western readers that the disinformation is true, Russian success is defined in two other ways: isolating the domestic audience from non-approved information so that state actions are permissible; and influencing foreign decision-making by supplying polluted information, exploiting the fact that Western elected representatives receive and are sensitive to the same information flows as their voters. When disinformation delivered in this manner is part of the framework for decisions, this constitutes success for Moscow, because a key element of the long-standing Soviet and Russian approach of reflexive control is in place.

It has also been suggested that Russian disinformation campaigns are self-defeating because they lead their creators into a 'discourse trap' – constraining their options by forcing them to subscribe

[209] See Maria Przełomiec, 'Is the West able to effectively fight back against Russia's information war?', Polish Institute of International Affairs, 27 February 2015, https://blog.pism.pl/blog/?p=1&id_blog=36&lang_id=12&id_post=512.
[210] Ian Burrell, 'RT breached broadcasting rules over claims BBC faked pictures of Syrian chemical attack, says Ofcom', *Independent*, 21 September 2015, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/rt-breached-broadcasting-rules-over-claims-bbc-faked-pictures-of-syrian-chemical-attack-says-ofcom-10511515.html.
[211] Speaking at the Lennart Meri Conference, 26 April 2015.
[212] For a screenshot of an example from February 2016, see https://twitter.com/KeirGiles/status/697394258647642112.
[213] Brian Ashcraft, 'Pro-Tip: Don't Copy Battlefield 3 Stingers', Kotaku, 23 July 2015, http://kotaku.com/pro-tip-dont-copy-battlefield-3-stingers-1719695507.

to their own narratives and to act in line with their own propaganda. But this, too, risks disregarding the particular features that pertain in Russia, in particular the complete unconcern for truth, reality or even consistency. Within the country, there is no discourse trap, since the picture of the world provided by the Russian media is entirely under Kremlin control and can be adjusted at will to justify any leadership action to the domestic audience. Abroad, foreign audiences are already baffled by the multiplicity of conflicting narratives available, and which few outside a narrow expert community will be tracking and attempting to expose as false. In this way, while the discourse trap would be a severe constraint for leaderships that are obliged to be even partially truthful or consistent, it fails entirely to close in Moscow.

This 'discourse trap' argument is related to the belief, widely held until at least late 2014, that obvious Russian disinformation was counterproductive, because unlike during the Cold War, Russian media audiences were no longer isolated and could therefore measure it against reality.[214] For the majority of the Russian population, including even those who take an informed interest in outside events, access to external reality is becoming more challenging. Portals such as InoSMI provide the semblance of a window on to the outside world, but in fact selectively translate and distort media reports in order to support the official state version of events, augmenting a view of the world which is unrecognizable from the original.[215] Meanwhile, Russian-language media can support this view by measures as effective and simple as omitting undesirable words from the Russian translations of Western leaders' speeches,[216] or simply not reporting on controversial topics at all.[217]

Influence – political and economic

A related concern is Russia's ability to purchase or co-opt business and political elites to create loyal or at least compliant networks. Bribes and business opportunities combine with the appeal of a Russian business culture which embraces opacity and corruption to recruit agents of influence throughout target countries. The result is direct input into political processes through 'Trojan horse' individuals or organizations, successfully acquiring influence across Central and Eastern Europe and beyond.[218] This is not a new process: in 2008, a study warned that the United Kingdom 'should be wary of placing reliance on EU or NATO solidarity, or on national leaders or key figures to act in what would appear to be their own national interests'.[219] Following the return of high oil revenues in the middle of that decade, Russia's interference in domestic political systems became increasingly reflected in financial and other support – transparent or opaque – for individuals and political parties abroad.[220]

[214] As expressed, for example, by a senior British speaker at the Warsaw Security Forum, November 2014.
[215] Rolf Fredheim, '"Filtering Foreign Media Content": How Russian News Agencies Repurpose Western News Reporting', *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2015, pp. 37–83.
[216] 'Merkel's Remark On "Criminal" Annexation Omitted In Russian Translation', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 12 May 2015, http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-merkel-putin-translation-criminal-word-omitted/27011285.html.
[217] 'Analysis: "Don't mention the war!" - Russian TV silent on troops near Ukraine', BBC Monitoring, 27 July 2015.
[218] Anne Applebaum, 'How Vladimir Putin is waging war on the West – and winning', *Spectator*, 21 February 2015, http://www.spectator.co.uk/features/9447782/how-vladimir-putin-is-waging-war-on-the-west-and-winning/.
[219] 'Russia - Future Directions', Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, 1 October 2008.
[220] Elena Servettaz, 'Putin's Far-Right Friends in Europe', Institute of Modern Russia, 16 January 2014, http://imrussia.org/en/russia-and-the-world/645-putins-far-right-friends-in-europe.

Russian objectives also encompass providing the appearance of broad-based support for specific government policies or political figures, especially those taking a pro-Russian line. Unlike in Soviet times, Russia is no longer restricted in its choice of foreign friends by considerations of ideology, and one notable result is a surge in links with right-wing and anti-EU parties, whose agenda falls in well with Russian state objectives and whose supporters are not always immune to the attraction of President Putin's declared support for traditional values.[221]

Russia continues actively to canvas for think-tank and academic sympathizers, to add to the ranks of individuals, some in influential positions, who for personal motivations are inclined to fall in with Moscow and promote Russian narratives in their own countries at the expense of their own credibility.[222] This approach works in combination with old-school subversive measures such as 'NGO diplomacy, or establishing and assisting pro-Russian youth groups, minority and separatist organisations, and think tanks abroad'.[223] In all of these approaches, Russia has revitalized techniques, principles and objectives formerly followed by the Soviet KGB in its programme of 'active measures'.[224]

The result is that externally, the multiplicity of deceptive narratives put forward by Russian information campaigns finds fertile ground among populations that are not well informed on the realities of history, geography and the issues at stake in Ukraine and other front-line states. In addition, this network of conscious or unwitting supporters facilitates the Russian aim of challenging unity among Western allies, and of creating divisions or exploiting existing ones in order to exert influence.[225]

Consequences

This pollution of the information framework for decision-making is a key element of the long-established Soviet and Russian principle of reflexive control – influencing the decision of your adversary by ensuring that he is supplied with specific information or disinformation on which to base it.[226] The Russian information warfare theorist Col. P. Koayesov explains how this works, both during and before open conflict:

> Information warfare consists in making an integrated impact on the opposing side's system of state and military command and control and its military-political leadership — an impact that would lead even in

[221] '«Черный интернационал». Как Москва кормит правые партии по всему миру' ['Black International'. How Moscow feeds right-wing parties all over the world], Insider, 27 November 2014, http://theins.ru/politika/2113; Andrew Rettman, 'Reports multiply of Kremlin links to anti-EU parties', EUObserver, 26 November 2014, https://euobserver.com/foreign/126676; Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber, 'Far-Right Europe Has a Crush on Moscow', *Moscow Times*, 25 November 2014, http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/far-right-europe-has-a-crush-on-moscow/511827.html; and Peter Tiede, 'Für mehr Einfluss auf Europa: Putin greift nach der AfD' [For more influence over Europe: Putin reaches for the AfD], *Bild*, 24 November 2014, http://www.bild.de/politik/inland/wladimir-putin/russlands-praesident-greift-nach-der-afd-kreml-netzwerk-38690092.bild.html.

[222] 'The Russian Military Asked Me to Publish Its Propaganda', War Is A Crime, 23 March 2015, http://warisacrime.org/print/69356; Julia Davis, 'Dana Rohrabacher claims that the former President of Ukraine was assassinated', Examiner, 6 April 2015, http://www.examiner.com/article/dana-rohrabacher-claims-that-the-former-president-of-ukraine-was-assassinated; James Kirchik, 'Putin Bootlickers Assemble in D.C.', Daily Beast, 31 March 2015, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/03/31/report-from-the-belly-of-the-putin-apologetics-beast.html.

[223] Sinikukka Saari, 'Russia's public diplomacy: soft tools with a hard edge', *Border Crossing*, April 2015.

[224] As described in a 1984 interview by KGB defector Yuriy Bezmenov which remains highly relevant today. See https://m.reddit.com/r/KotakuInAction/comments/3vn9wv/exkgb_member_explains_psychological_warfare_aimed/.

[225] Andrew Higgins, 'Waving Cash, Putin Sows E.U. Divisions in an Effort to Break Sanctions', *New York Times*, 6 April 2015, http://nyti.ms/1ac50sT

[226] As described in detail in Thomas, *Recasting the Red Star*.

> peacetime to the adoption of decisions favourable to the party initiating the information impact, and in the course of conflict would totally paralyze the functioning of the enemy's command and control infrastructure.[227]

Danger arises when successful pollution by Russia of the opinion-forming process in the West spills over into influence on the policy-making process itself. At the very least, objective assessment of what Russia is doing is effectively suppressed: many narratives absolving Moscow or placing the blame for the current crisis elsewhere will find willing audiences in those policy circles that would wish to accommodate Russia and return to business as usual as swiftly as possible, as was the case following the armed conflict in Georgia in 2008. Those who decide or guide policy can be influenced either directly (even when not purchased in the course of the concurrent Russian campaign to recruit agents of influence)[228] or indirectly via the electorate, since in Western democracies elected representatives do at least on occasion listen to their voters and give attention to their concerns. This effect is even more pronounced when these voters repeating Russian-influenced viewpoints are also respected academics.[229]

As a result, Russian-inspired narratives can appear in surprising and disturbing circumstances. The notion that NATO enlargement is to blame for the Ukraine crisis has spread well beyond academia, even though the academic John Mearsheimer remains for the time being the bête noire of the Russia-watching community thanks to his embrace of the Russian view on this issue.[230] The accompanying fiction that Russia was given a promise at the time of German reunification that there would be no NATO enlargement is repeatedly quoted as fact. But other memes that reach politicians through their electorate or media can be more subtle and therefore insidious.[231] The habitual description of the conflict in Ukraine as a 'civil war' and the Russian-backed separatists as local 'rebels' represents a success for Russian information operations.[232] So does the dissemination of the highly dangerous argument that the best way to respond to Russian nuclear posturing is to withdraw the last remaining non-strategic nuclear weapons from Western Europe.[233]

Even more dangerously, in circumstances which would require complete Western consensus – such as a decision on collective action to be taken by NATO – Russian information warfare could play a key role by fatally undermining essential unity among Western allies. As explained by leading Latvian expert Jānis Bērziņš:

[227] P. Koayesov, 'Theatre of Warfare on Distorting Airwaves. Georgia Versus South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the Field of Media Abuse. Fighting by Their Own Rules', *Voyennyy Vestnik Yuga Rossii*, 18 January 2009.
[228] 'Putin's Secret Friends in Paris', The XX Committee, 9 September 2014, http://20committee.com/2014/09/09/putins-secret-friends-in-paris/.
[229] As with 'Demonising Russia won't give us security', *Guardian*, 4 February 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/04/demonising-russia-wont-give-us-security.
[230] John J. Mearsheimer, 'Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin', *Foreign Affairs*, September–October 2014, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/ articles/141769/john-j-mearsheimer/why-the-ukraine-crisis-is-the-wests-fault.
[231] To take just one example, a member of the UK House of Commons' Foreign Affairs Committee in February 2015 raised the issue of Ukraine, as a failing state, being potentially unable to maintain its nuclear facilities safely – a notion based entirely on unsubstantiated allegations in Russian media coverage such as 'Radioactive leak at major Ukrainian nuclear plant – report', RT, 30 December 2014, http://rt.com/news/218807-ukraine-nuclear-plant-leak/.
[232] Rory Finnin and Thomas D. Grant, 'Don't call it a civil war – Ukraine's conflict is an act of Russian aggression', The Conversation, 24 August 2015, http://theconversation.com/dont-call-it-a-civil-war-ukraines-conflict-is-an-act-of-russian-aggression-46280.
[233] As reflected in 'Rethinking deterrence and assurance', Wilton Park conference report, 10–13 June 2015.

> The key element of the Russian strategy is the notion that the war is essentially staged in the minds of the participants [...] Information operations have a great role to play, and they have reached a point where they can take on strategic tasks.[234]

A strategic task such as preventing a NATO consensus on meeting Article 5 commitments when requested would be the ultimate prize for a Russian information campaign, eliminating NATO's raison d'être at a stroke and immediately justifying years of immense investment in information warfare. As noted by President Toomas Ilves of Estonia:

> It is of such crucial existential importance to NATO that Article 5 be observed [...] as soon as Article 5 doesn't work, every country is on its own, and the only country that can handle being on its own is the United States.[235]

The threat of Russian information campaigns is thus that, in combination with other tools, they prepare the ground for future Russian action which would be directly counter to the interests of Europe and the West. By either undermining the will or support for deterrent measures, or by sowing an entirely false impression that it is justified in its actions, Russia adjusts key variables in the security calculus determining the risk inherent in future assertive action against its neighbours. In the case of Ukraine, Russia felt the balance was tipped sufficiently in its favour to act; but Ukraine, and Georgia before it, are unlikely to be the last neighbours of Russia to fall victim to this calculation. Current Russian ambitions, if followed to their conclusion, must necessarily lead to a more direct confrontation with the West. Russia now benefits from a highly developed information warfare arsenal, and this will be a key facilitator in preparing for further actions against its Western neighbours.

For example, Martin Hurt argues:

> No matter which country Russia picks on next, it is almost certain that the first phase will be an attempt to harm its international reputation using provocations and dirty tactics in order to isolate it from its EU and NATO allies. For example, heads of governments must be prepared to explain to their publics that social media footage of purportedly murdered Russian children and elderly people are just one of many tactics whose ultimate goal is to dismantle European security.[236]

Awareness of the destructive potential of hostile information campaigns is also growing in fields that are entirely unrelated to state or non-state adversaries such as Russia. The technique of sowing doubt in the existence of objective truth, in order that implausible narratives can gain traction and 'ignorance can often be propagated under the guise of balanced debate', has also been attributed to the tobacco industry.[237] The phenomenon of source proliferation undermining the authority of genuine sources has been noted in science, with the problem of 'predatory journals' diluting properly peer-reviewed scientific journal articles with unevaluated material, leading to readers

[234] Jānis Bērziņš, 'Russian New Generation Warfare: Implications for Europe', European Leadership Network, 14 October 2014, http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/russian-new-generation-warfare-implications-for-europe_2006.html.
[235] Leonid Bershidsky, 'Estonia Did Its Post-Soviet Homework', Bloomberg View, 3 March 2015, http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-03-03/estonia-did-its-post-soviet-homework.
[236] Martin Hurt, 'The potential for hybrid warfare in Central and Western Europe', European Leadership Network, 9 October 2014, http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/the-potential-for-hybrid-warfare-in-central-and-western-europe_1989.html.
[237] Kenyon, 'The man who studies the spread of ignorance'.

being 'unable to distinguish between credible research and junk science'.[238] And in the United Kingdom, controversy over local elections in the London borough of Tower Hamlets brought widespread attention to the vulnerabilities of liberal political processes to subversive information campaigns. This incident demonstrated how a dedicated group of individuals can seize political power using concerted efforts to target a specific community's points of susceptibility by means of intimidation, disinformation, making use of cultural and religious sensitivities, and targeting the disaffected – tapping into existing or manufactured senses of grievance or exclusion.[239] The results are likely to have been studied by Russian theorists of information warfare, and combined with precedents from previous decades that testify to the effectiveness of campaigns specifically intended to undermine Western defence readiness. Exercise Hard Rock was a 1982 UK emergency exercise at national scale intended to practise responses to a Soviet nuclear strike. It was successfully derailed by a sustained and intensive information campaign which led to a number of county councils withdrawing their support.[240]

The mass consciousness of Western populations is thus a key arena for confrontation with Russia. In terms of the potentially disastrous effects on domestic audiences, little has changed since a 2008 study of hybrid warfare wrote the following:

> The battle over competing narratives plays out among three audiences: the indigenous population, the home front of the great power, and the wider international community. Great powers risk losing conflicts in which they fail to understand either the human terrain or the 'decisive battlegrounds of public opinion at home and abroad.'[241]

This decisive nature of domestic attitudes in the context of military operations was noted in another study written a year later, with the reflection: 'If the story has the potential to erode public support, either domestically or internationally, then it is, in fact, mission critical.'[242] It is to this critical point that Russian information warfare seeks to apply pressure.

Cyber, trolls and bots

In the Russian case, cyber activities in the broad sense are critical to offensive disinformation campaigns – whether establishing sources for disinformation by setting up false media outlets online,[243] or using social media to address targets of opportunity for subversion and destabilization efforts apparently unrelated to events in Ukraine.[244] These activities are augmented by the ubiquitous activities of trolls (online profiles run by humans) and bots (run by automated processes), which exploit specific features of the relationship between traditional and social media

[238] Robert E. Bartholomew, 'Science for sale: the rise of predatory journals', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, Vol. 107, No. 10, 2014, pp. 384–85.
[239] 'Judgment In The High Court Of Justice, Queen's Bench Division, In The Matter Of The Representation Of The People Act 1983 And In The Matter Of A Mayoral Election For The London Borough Of Tower Hamlets Held On 22 May 2014', http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/judgment.pdf.
[240] See, for example, Duncan Campbell, 'Bad day at Hard Rock', *New Statesman*, 17 September 1982, pp. 6–9.
[241] John J. McCuen, 'Hybrid Wars', *Military Review*, March–April 2008, pp. 107–13.
[242] Cori E. Dauber, 'YouTube War: Fighting In A World Of Cameras In Every Cell Phone And Photoshop On Every Computer', US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, November 2009, p. ix.
[243] Rohac, 'Cranks, Trolls, and Useful Idiots'.
[244] Doug Bernard, 'America's Adversaries Use Baltimore Unrest to Spread Anti-US Message', Voice of America, 30 April 2015, http://www.voanews.com/articleprintview/2743166.html.

in order to plant, disseminate and lend credibility to disinformation.[245] The large amount of resources devoted to doing so results from the recognition that:

> … digital media are becoming the main – and for a growing number of young people, the only – channel for political information and communication. They are the primary space for political activities, where citizens receive political information, shape their political views and beliefs, and have the opportunity to influence the processes related to functioning of power.[246]

Russia's cyber activities consequently also capitalize on the fact that 'new social media have become the most effective tool for influencing the minds of huge communities, even whole nations'.[247]

A substantial body of research on Russian troll campaigns has developed in the West since early 2014, to add to the Russian-language reporting available previously.[248] Their key features are well documented and will not be repeated here.[249] Nevertheless, awareness of the different tactics and techniques used by the troll armies is not universal. For example, even Michael McFaul, former US ambassador to Russia and a regular target of intense trolling campaigns, was still wondering in May 2015 at the rationale behind 'hundreds of Twitter messages saying the same thing, as if they are coordinated'.[250]

In Western reporting of this Russian approach, attention has been focused exclusively on a single 'troll farm' in St Petersburg. Despite the fact that the existence and activities of this organization have been well documented since late 2014, thanks to on-the-spot reporting by local Russian media later followed up by Finnish and other investigative journalism,[251] it continues to feature recurrently in Western media – assisted by former employees giving repeated interviews.[252] The Russian authorities appear content to leave this location in the spotlight, as it serves as an effective distraction from the wider network of troll farms, or the organization behind them.[253] Well aware of

[245] Polina Tikhonova, 'Russia Hacking Your News', ValueWalk, 14 March 2015, http://www.valuewalk.com/2015/03/russia-hacking-your-news/.
[246] Velichka Milina, 'Security in a Communications Society: Opportunities and Challenges', *Connections*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Spring 2012, p. 55.
[247] Ibid.
[248] For an early example, see reportage by Saara Jantunen, a specialist in strategic communications at the Finnish Defence Research Agency, 'Trolliarmeija, eli Venäjän informaatio-psykologinen sodankäynti' [The troll army, or Russia's information-psychological warfare], Random thoughts, 18 September 2014, https://fmashiri.wordpress.com/2014/09/18/trolliarmeija-eli-venajan-informaatio-psykologinen-sodankaynti/.
[249] For a useful summary, see 'Web brigades', Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_brigades.
For a more detailed view, see Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money* (New York, NY: The Institute of Modern Russia, 2014); 'Russian trolls spread government propaganda', Al Jazeera, 11 August 2015, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/08/russian-trolls-internet-government-propaganda-150811205218686.html; 'This is How Pro-Russia Trolls Manipulate Finns Online – Check the List of Forums Favored by Propagandists', Stopfake, 13 July 2015, http://www.stopfake.org/en/this-is-how-pro-russia-trolls-manipulate-finns-online-check-the-list-of-forums-favored-by-propagandists/.
[250] Michael McFaul, 'What's it like to be hated by the Russian internet?', *Guardian*, 26 May 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/26/russia-internet-hated.
[251] Anton Butsenko, 'Тролли из Ольгино переехали в новый четырехэтажный офис на Савушкина' [Trolls from Olgino move to a new four-storey office on Savushkina Street], *Delovoy Peterburg*, 28 October 2014, http://www.dp.ru/103iph/; Jessikka Aro, 'Yle Kioski Traces the Origins of Russian Social Media Propaganda – Never-before-seen Material from the Troll Factory', Yle, 20 February 2015, http://kioski.yle.fi/omat/at-the-origins-of-russian-propaganda; Alec Luhn, 'Game of trolls: the hip digi-kids helping Putin's fight for online supremacy', *Guardian*, 18 August 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/18/trolls-putin-russia-savchuk.
[252] Most prominently Marat Burkhardt and Lyudmila Savchuk. Among many examples of sustained media coverage, see 'One Professional Russian Troll Tells All', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 25 March 2015, http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/26919999.html; and Tom Parfitt, 'My life as a pro-Putin propagandist in Russia's secret "troll factory"', *Daily Telegraph*, 24 June 2015, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/11656043/My-life-as-a-pro-Putin-propagandist-in-Russias-secret-troll-factory.html.
[253] 'Blogger uncovers evidence using Google Trends of several new pro-Kremlin "troll factories"', Meduza, 19 August 2015, https://meduza.io/en/news/2015/08/19/blogger-uncovers-evidence-using-google-trends-of-several-new-pro-kremlin-troll-factories.

the attention, in at least one case Russia has mounted an elaborate sting to attempt to discredit a foreign journalist looking into the story.[254]

Elsewhere, the diffused, uncoordinated and self-regulating nature of social media has facilitated effective self-defence mechanisms. A new alertness to the prevalence of orchestrated troll campaigns has led to the dissemination of self-help guides for dealing with trolls in the absence of moderation.[255] The growing availability of tools for detection of the less sophisticated troll and bot campaigns through technical and quantitative analysis is assisting in spreading awareness.[256] As a result, according to one Russian assessment, despite the 'billions of dollars' spent by the Russian state on attempting to 'turn social networks into its obedient weapon [...] net society has developed immunity. Now the negative effect from the Kremlin's efforts to manipulate the opinion of net society is such that it de facto negates these efforts'.[257]

But similarly to disinformation efforts overall, the Russian troll campaign is more effective than generally believed.[258] One key reason is that it is not a static project, but instead constantly develops new approaches not yet reflected in mainstream reporting or popular awareness. A second wave of trolling, augmented by bot resources, is now well developed, and appears to include more sophisticated features to increase its effectiveness and respond to the countermeasures described above. To take one example, the 'bikini trolls' described by Mārtiņš Daugulis of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence feature scantily clad young ladies in their profile pictures, with enticing descriptions, and 'target an especially vulnerable social group, men over the age of 45'.[259] But a key feature of this approach is that these profiles attract followers and interaction from their targets – and thus defeat some of the tools for troll and bot analysis which were effective at highlighting and exposing more straightforward profiles.

Another related campaign that is commonly underestimated entails the use of false accounts posing as authoritative information sources on social media. The Twitter accounts @Vaalit ('Elections' in Finnish) and @EuroVaalit look at first sight like innocent, and possibly even official, sources of election information, and no doubt many people without looking closely take them for precisely that. But in fact they and a range of associated accounts repeat Russian disinformation, and their profiles link to RT. Multiply this approach by many different languages, countries and campaigns, and factor in Russian successes in closing down opposing social media accounts as described above, and the cumulative effect cannot be other than highly corrosive.

[254] Adrian Chen, 'The Agency', *New York Times*, 2 June 2015, http://mobile.nytimes.com/2015/06/07/magazine/the-agency.html.
[255] A popular infographic depicting 'The Five Stages of Arguing with a Russian Nationalist' is a prime example, http://i.imgur.com/ka4Gmdo.jpg.
[256] Lawrence Alexander, 'A Response to the Kremlin-Bot Skeptics', Global Voices, 24 April 2015, http://globalvoicesonline.org/2015/04/24/a-response-to-the-kremlin-bot-skeptics/print/.
[257] 'Владимир Голышев: «В информационной войне надо «идти на грозу»»' [Vladimir Golshev: 'In an information war, it is necessary to "go onto an all-out offensive"'], Russkiy Monitor, 29 January 2015, http://rusmonitor.com/vladimir-golyshev-v-informacionnojj-vojjne-nado-idti-na-grozu.html.
[258] Zachary Fillingham, 'Internet Trolls: Propaganda's Final Frontier', Geopolitical Monitor, 16 March 2015, http://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/internet-trolls-the-final-frontier-of-propaganda/.
[259] Mārtiņš Daugulis, speaking at the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence inaugural conference, 20 August 2015. See also 'Internet Trolling as a hybrid warfare tool: the case of Latvia', NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, undated, http://www.stratcomcoe.org/internet-trolling-hybrid-warfare-tool-case-latvia.

5. Trigger Points

In 2009, Ukraine was already described as 'the single most important conflict issue in the relationship [between Russia and the West], and with no obvious end result'.[260] But it is far from the only one, and trends to date suggest that a Russia growing in confidence and capability will certainly be inclined to resolve other conflicts in the not too distant future.

Russia's move on Crimea may have come as a strategic surprise for much of the West, but this was despite a range of well-informed analysis at the time of the Georgia conflict pointing specifically to Crimea as the next logical target for an assertive Russia.[261] These forecasts were correct, but depended on a particular combination of circumstances: a trigger event posing a specific perceived threat for Russia (Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU), and the development of military capability to the point where there was an opportunity to be taken at low risk of adverse consequence. Assessing the likelihood of the next Russian intervention means considering the risk calculus as viewed from Moscow, and seeking the next combination of trigger and opportunity.

While Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are widely considered the most likely next potential victims of Russian intervention, they are far from the only candidates. In early 2015, the undefended nature of the Swedish island of Gotland, despite its strategically vital position in the Baltic, received substantial public attention.[262] The Danish island of Bornholm has also featured in publicly discussed scenarios for Russian assertive action, as has the tiny Polish village of Redzikowo, as detailed below.

There is no doubt that Russia possesses the tools and levers to attempt to impose its will on its neighbours.[263] What is lacking at present is the trigger event. There is a wide range of potential triggers, and it is essential to bear in mind that not all of them are immediately obvious outside Russia. The distinctly Russian concept of what constitutes national security, and a view of international relations which is at odds with that held in the rest of Europe, mean that – as was the case with Ukraine – assessing actions and reactions by criteria that seem rational in Western capitals will be of limited use. As noted by a detailed Finnish study: 'It is good to keep in mind that Russia's sore points are almost invariably psychological and tactical.'[264] Understanding this psychology is crucial.

[260] Bertil Nygren, 'Conclusions: Visions of Russia's Future Foreign Policy', in Bertil Nygren, Bo Huldt, Patrik Ahlgren, Pekka Sivonen and Susanna Huldt (eds), *Russia On Our Minds: Russian Security Policy and Northern Europe*, Swedish National Defence College, 2010, p. 280.
[261] See, for instance, Mikhail Barabanov, 'Ukraine, NATO and Russia', *Moscow Defense Brief*, No. 4, 2008; Jakob Hedenskog, *Crimea After the Georgian Crisis*, Swedish Defence Research Agency, November 2008; Aurel Braun, 'NATO and Russia: Post-Georgia Threat Perceptions', French Institute of International Relations, May 2009; Leon Aron, 'The Georgia Watershed', *Russian Outlook*, Fall 2008; Tomislava Penkova, 'Russia's attitude towards the post-Soviet space after the war in Georgia', Italian Institute for International Political Studies, No. 111, December 2008; Steven Pifer, 'Crisis Between Ukraine and Russia', Council on Foreign Relations, July 2009; Timo Kivinen, 'Russia's National Interests and Ukraine: What Policies Might Russia Adapt [sic] In Pursuing These Interests', Royal College of Defence Studies, 2008 course.
[262] As with, for example, Thomas Theiner, 'Gotland – the Danzig of our time', Euromaidan Press, 22 March 2015, http://euromaidanpress.com/2015/03/22/gotland-the-danzig-of-our-time/.
[263] Jakob Hedenskog and Robert Larsson, *Russian Leverage on the CIS and the Baltic States*, Swedish Defence Research Agency, June 2007.
[264] 'Russia of Challenges', Ministry of Defence, Finland, 2008, p. 142.

The following issues all present potential points of neuralgia in the Russian security picture, and any one of them could trigger an assertive intervention in defence of what Russia sees as its legitimate interests:

- *'Securing borders'*. The security of the country's borders, and by extension control over the approaches to them in substantial depth, has been a persistent concern in Russia's history over centuries. In the 20th century this was one of the drivers that led to Soviet ultimatums to the Baltic states and Finland in 1939, and eventually to their invasion. More recently, this same concern lies at the root of the constant complaint over NATO 'approaching Russia's borders', and was a contributing factor to actions in Georgia in 2008. A wide range of perfectly innocent actions can be perceived in Moscow as compromising border security and justifying an assertive response.[265]

- *'Protecting allies'*. A recurring reference in Russian strategic documentation (such as the Military Doctrine and National Security Strategy) is the protection of Russia *and its allies*. Under the Collective Security Treaty, Russia's obligations towards other members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization are far stronger than those imposed on NATO allies by the North Atlantic Treaty. A threat to the security of another member state, whether real or invented, could be used to legitimize intervention by Russia 'in accordance with treaty obligations'. In particular, the delicate balancing act between Russia and the West by Belarus should be watched closely, especially after the October 2015 election gave President Alyaksandr Lukashenka a new mandate. Despite key differences with the situation in Ukraine, there are enough factors in common that Russian hostile action to protect its interests in Belarus becomes more likely with each step by Lukashenka towards rapprochement with the West.

- *Missile defence*. Russia's long-standing objections to ballistic missile defence overall, and to the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) in particular, were overshadowed in 2014–15 by the Ukraine crisis, but they have not gone away. Russia has promised direct action against the planned missile defence installation in Redzikowo, Poland, which it describes as the site that most directly compromises its strategic nuclear deterrent. The window of opportunity for taking this action is limited.[266]

- *Potential NATO accession by Finland and/or Sweden*.[267] Despite recent increased focus on the NATO debate in both countries, the issues involved remain unchanged – as, broadly, does the balance of public opinion. However, this has not prevented Russia from making direct and specific threats to both countries.[268]

This is, of course, not an exhaustive list. Continued close attention to developing Russian views and capabilities is essential.

[265] A topic explored in detail by Alfred J. Rieber in 'How Persistent Are Persistent Factors?', in Robert Legvold (ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century and the Shadow of the Past* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007).
[266] As detailed in Keir Giles and Andrew Monaghan, *European Missile Defense and Russia*, US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, July 2014, http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1219. See also 'Russia threatens strike against EU-hosted missile shield', EurActiv, 4 May 2012, http://www.euractiv.com/global-europe/russia-threatens-strike-missile-shield-news-512486.
[267] See Stefan Forss and Pekka Holopainen, *Breaking the Nordic Defence Deadlock*, January 2015, http://tinyurl.com/mdunr9q; and Keir Giles and Susanna Eskola, *Waking the Neighbour: Finland, NATO and Russia*, UK Defence Academy, 2009.
[268] Including publicly in Helsinki, for instance in 'Kenraali Makarovin puhe kokonaisuudessaan' [General Makarov's Speech In Full], Yle, 7 June 2012, http://yle.fi/uutiset/kenraali_makarovin_puhe_kokonaisuudessaan/6169951.

Western responses

Russia's risk calculus will of course be affected by the countermeasures that NATO, the EU and individual nations take in response to their renewed awareness of the threat. The following section reviews these responses in the military and information domains, and attempts to evaluate their effectiveness from the perspective of potential Russian action. The issue of EU and North American sanctions is not addressed; their long-term effects and sustainability remain unclear, and the short-term damage sustained by the Russian economy in the past two years is far more the result of the dramatic fall in the price of oil.[269]

Military

In September 2014, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General Philip Breedlove commented on preparation for resisting the perceived nature of Russian 'hybrid war'. He said that the unavowed nature of Russian military intervention in Ukraine, if repeated against a NATO member, meant the alliance would have to rely on 'nations' ability to fight through that first onslaught' before establishing positive attribution of the assailant in order to begin the Article 5 process.[270] This can hardly have been reassuring news for front-line states whose ability to withstand a Russian onslaught could potentially be measured in hours or days.[271] NATO proposals to defend its easternmost members have moved on and become more proactive, but the concern remains among informed experts that current Western responses will do little to deter further Russian military adventurism.[272]

NATO's Wales summit in September 2014 presented an opportunity to address the issue of deterrence. NATO measures agreed then, in particular the Readiness Action Plan and Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF),[273] are appropriate for addressing purely military threats, but hardly appear adequate when compared with the scale of Russian preparations for conflict. In addition, they provide only a single dimension of reassurance to front-line states; additional elements are required to protect against Russian tools of influence other than conventional military attack.[274] According to one informed but independent NATO academic, the Wales summit's declarations contained 'remarkably little on the force requirements and political commitment necessary to carry out the collective defense mission that is enshrined in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty'.[275]

[269] Including directly affecting plans for expansion of Russian media abroad by making their operations greatly more expensive. See Delphine d'Amora, 'Pro-Kremlin Media Sees Cuts as Russian Economy Slows', *Moscow Times*, 23 January 2015, http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/ruble-s-fall-checks-expansion-of-pro-kremlin-media-abroad/514846.html.
[270] John Vandiver, 'SACEUR: Allies must prepare for Russia "hybrid war"', *Stars and Stripes*, 4 September 2014, http://www.stripes.com/news/saceur-allies-must-prepare-for-russia-hybrid-war-1.301464.
[271] Including in the assessment of one RAND study, which despite deeply flawed analysis arrived at essential conclusions. David A. Shlapak and Michael Johnson, 'Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics', RAND Corporation, 2 February 2016, http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html.
[272] Shlapak and Johnson, 'Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank'; John Schindler, 'Beware Putin's Special War in 2015', The XX Committee, 23 December 2014, http://20committee.com/2014/12/23/beware-putins-special-war-in-2015/.
[273] See 'The Readiness Action Plan', NATO, 13 October 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_119353.htm.
[274] A more detailed deconstruction of the Russian approach is available in Heidi Reisinger and Aleksandr Golts, *Russia's Hybrid Warfare*, NATO Defense College, November 2014.
[275] Jeffrey A. Larsen, *The Wales Summit and NATO's Deterrence Capabilities: An Assessment*, NATO Defense College, November 2014.

Meanwhile, however, a range of steps being taken at national and bilateral level will begin to have an effect on Russian military risk assessment. The exercises conducted by NATO members in Poland and the Baltic states, as well as the Trident Juncture exercise across Europe in October 2015, amount to a token gesture compared to the Russian 'snap inspection' programme involving tens of thousands of troops.[276] That being said, their small scale has not prevented them from being portrayed in Russian information campaigns as aggressive and highly threatening. But it is rapid increases in defence spending by NATO members and by Finland and Sweden, including purchases of weapons systems specifically designed to counter the most immediate Russian military threats, that will be most effective in beginning to tip the balance.[277] These investments come in addition to urgent measures to make best use of the limited resources already available, such as an unprecedented military exercise in Estonia[278] and the reintroduction of conscription in Lithuania.

Bilateral measures undertaken by the United States are both more significant for Russia, and – by design – more visible to the European populations they seek to reassure.[279] US measures under the Atlantic Resolve programme, provided for by dedicated funding under the European Reassurance Initiative, mean that main battle tanks have returned to Estonia for the first time since 1994. In addition, demonstrative and militarily significant air assets have been deployed to Poland and the Baltic states, including F-22 Raptor advanced stealth tactical fighters, Predator UAVs and A-10 ground attack aircraft.[280]

In early 2016, after protracted internal debate in the US administration, it was announced that funding for this critical programme would be quadrupled in the following year. The announcement was welcomed as a valuable demonstration of US commitment to European security, which would send an appropriately strong message to Russia. As put by Evelyn Farkas, a former senior US defence official responsible for Russia and Ukraine policy: 'This is a really big deal, and the Russians are going to have a cow' – an American idiom which gave rise to a wide range of speculative interpretations in Eastern European reporting.[281] Fears that the increased investment in reassurance and deterrence would in some way provoke Russia to further escalation were misplaced: Estonian Chief of Defence Lt-Gen Riho Terras noted that 'Russia has just increased its

[276] 'Trident Juncture 2015', NATO Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum, undated, http://www.jfcbs.nato.int/trident-juncture.aspx; 'UK's Show Of Force Against Russian Aggression', Atlantic Council, 24 November 2014, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/uk-s-show-of-force-against-russian-aggression; and Lorne Cook, 'France Sending Tanks To Poland', Associated Press, 30 January 2015.
[277] Michel Viatteau, 'Poland to spend billions on defense amid rumblings of war in Europe', Agence France-Presse, 16 February 2015; James Rogers and Ugis Romanovs, 'Baltic Military Preparations after Ukraine: A Sufficiently "Prickly" Deterrent?', Royal United Services Institute, March 2015, https://www.rusi.org/publications/newsbrief/ref:A54F0A19AD58F5/; 'Estonia – Javelin Missiles', US Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 7 October 2014, http://www.dsca.mil/major-arms-sales/estonia-javelin-missiles; 'Baltic states seek defence against Russian threat', BBC News, 27 October 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-echochambers-29766667?print=true.
[278] Kuno Peek, '"Hedgehog", Estonia's biggest military exercise of all time – does every quill really count?', International Centre for Defence and Security, 9 March 2015, http://www.icds.ee/blog/article/hedgehog-estonias-biggest-military-exercise-of-all-time-does-every-quill-really-count/.
[279] Rick Lyman, 'An American Military Convoy in Europe Aims to Reassure Allies', *New York Times*, 29 March 2015, http://nyti.ms/1ElTlqc.
[280] 'Fact Sheet: European Reassurance Initiative and Other U.S. Efforts in Support of NATO Allies and Partners', White House, 3 June 2014, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/03/fact-sheet-european-reassurance-initiative-and-other-us-efforts-support-; Kaja Kunnas, 'USA:n panssarivaunut saapuivat Viroon: maassa on nyt panssarivaunuja ensimmäisen kerran sitten vuoden 1994' [US tanks arrive in Estonia: there are now tanks in the country for the first time since 1994], *Helsingin Sanomat*, 14 March 2015, http://www.hs.fi/ulkomaat/a1305937611277; 'F-22 inaugural deployment to Europe', US Air Forces in Europe, 28 August 2015, http://www.usafe.af.mil/news/story_print.asp?id=123457085; Richard Sisk, 'US Deploys Two MQ-1 Predator Drones to Latvia', DoD Buzz, 31 August 2015, http://www.dodbuzz.com/2015/08/31/us-deploys-two-mq-1-predator-drones-to-latvia/; 'U.S. Air Force A-10 attack planes have arrived in Estonia', The Aviationist, 3 May 2015, http://theaviationist.com/2015/05/03/a-10s-have-arrived-in-estonia/.
[281] Mark Landler and Helene Cooper, 'U.S. Fortifying Europe's East to Deter Putin', *New York Times*, 1 February 2016.

conventional forces in its Western Military District by three new divisions, which is almost 60,000 soldiers. This all means the situation can't escalate much further.'[282]

After a long period of acceptance of shrinking budgets, Europe is now hearing increasingly robust language on defence spending, including NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stating clearly that decreases in military spending across the EU 'cannot continue'.[283] Outside NATO, Sweden too plans to increase defence spending – a move with an unprecedented level of cross-party support,[284] underlining the unambiguous nature of Russian air and submarine intimidation. The Finnish public is apparently prepared to follow suit despite a continuing deep economic crisis.[285] Practical steps include Sweden returning a token military presence to the island of Gotland, long identified as a key vulnerability, and long-overdue moves towards closer Nordic defence cooperation.[286]

NATO's aspiration for members to spend 2 per cent of GDP on defence is a purely symbolic target that has little to do with any actual measure of defence capability that might result.[287] But the symbolism is an important manifestation of commitment to defence. In the case of Lithuania, the failure to meet the target before 2019 conceals significant increases in spending in recent years, meaning that the 2015 defence budget is double that of 2012.[288] The case of the United Kingdom is in some ways the reverse: in a move of striking hypocrisy following its encouragement that other NATO allies should meet the 2 per cent spending target, the UK government's claim that it is doing so itself is now only possible as a result of bookkeeping sleight of hand and by including in the expenditure new items unrelated to defence capability.[289]

Reversing the trend of declining defence spending is only one means of deterring Russia from future assertive action; but it is an essential one, since to neglect it is to offer an open invitation. But one unarguable achievement by Russia is the transformation of the security environment in Central and Eastern Europe. Faced with a challenge that is no longer deniable, Europe has overcome its 'strategic inertia'.[290] NATO, in particular, has been revitalized: the alliance's agenda has shifted radically from contemplation of a future role after withdrawal from Afghanistan, now that it has a clear motivation to return to its core purpose. Poland and the Baltic states, long cast as irresponsible trouble-makers for warning of the implications of a resurgent Russia, are now fully vindicated and benefiting from the overall NATO and unilateral US military responses.

[282] 'Terras: US plan to increase military presence in Europe a good sign', ERR, 3 February 2016, http://news.err.ee/v/defense/74a50357-12dd-4f96-83f5-6a03e5eaca8d/terras-us-plan-to-increase-military-presence-in-europe-a-good-sign.
[283] 'Nato chief: defence cuts "cannot continue"', BBC Democracy Live, 31 March 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/democracylive/europe-32120373.
[284] 'Swedish government says plans to boost defence spending', Reuters, 12 March 2015; Charlie Duxbury, 'Sweden Plans to Increase Military Spending', *Wall Street Journal*, 12 March 2015, http://www.wsj.com/articles/sweden-plans-to-increase-military-spending-1426198507; 'Moderaterna öppnar för samtal om försvaret' [Moderates open for talks on defence], DN.se, 17 March 2015, http://www.dn.se/nyheter/politik/moderaterna-oppnar-for-samtal-om-forsvaret/
[285] 'Most Finns are ready to step up defence spending', *Helsinki Times*, 16 March 2015, http://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/domestic/13283-most-finns-are-ready-to-step-up-defence-spending.html.
[286] 'Ministern: Gotland ska få nytt militärförband' [Minister: Gotland will have a new military unit], *Dagens Nyheter*, 12 March 2015, http://www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/ministern-gotland-ska-fa-nytt-militarforband/; 'Sweden's Gotland A Crucial Square In Europe's Military Chess Board', NPR, 27 January 2015, http://www.npr.org/2015/01/27/381942721/swedens-gotland-a-crucial-square-in-europes-military-chess-board; Maria Gestrin-Hagner, 'Forskare föreslår nordisk pakt' [Researchers suggest Nordic pact], *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 17 February 2015. See also Forss and Holopainen, *Breaking the Nordic Defence Deadlock*.
[287] John Deni, 'Burden Sharing and NATO's 2 Percent Goal', Carnegie Europe, 14 April 2015, http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/?fa=59767.
[288] Cited by Lithuania's deputy minister of national defence, Marijus Velička, at the Warsaw Security Forum, November 2014.
[289] 'Defence Expenditure – NATO 2% Target', UK House of Commons, 21 October 2015, http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN07134.
[290] Andrew Michta, 'Europe's Moment of Blinding Strategic Clarity', *American Interest*, 24 October 2014, http://www.the-american-interest.com/2014/10/24/europes-moment-of-blinding-strategic-clarity/.

Information

Responses to non-military challenges are also developing swiftly, primarily in a non-NATO framework. National and EU initiatives to combat Russian information warfare have belatedly been announced.

Countering Russian information offensives of the kind described earlier provides an object lesson in asymmetry. It is easy to manufacture a lie, and relatively cheap to distribute it widely. To demolish that lie takes intensive effort, and meanwhile the nature of the internet ensures that it lives, breeds and reinforces other lies. Despite the fact that the British Army's combination of a number of different information operations disciplines into a single formation, 77 Brigade, is a move that would be instantly recognizable to Russian advocates of 'Information Troops',[291] a direct response to the Russian approach is impossible. As noted in a detailed study from early 2015:

> It will never, in fact, be possible for the West to respond exactly in kind to a hybrid mix of tactics such as that employed by Moscow. While special forces and intelligence agencies can do clever things, Western governments cannot effectively restrict information flows, for example by narrowing Internet freedoms as do governments in totalitarian countries. Major attempts at deception will, in open societies, sooner or later be exposed, rendering them counterproductive.[292]

Thus, even the much-needed support for domestic media in Western nations – a topic addressed in the 'Policy Implications' chapter – needs to be provided with extreme delicacy in order to avoid any taint of direction or constraint.

Instead, the first and best weapon for countering Russian information operations is awareness: not only among national officials and mainstream media, but throughout the society that the operation uses as its medium. Early and candid public recognition of the problem has been a key enabler for addressing it; as with, for example, Finland's former defence minister, Carl Haglund, who was one of the first senior European officials to call public attention to the threat.[293] Latvia provides another example where growing awareness of the problem and discussion in mainstream media have facilitated taking steps to provide Russian-language media alternatives for the country's substantial Russian-speaking population.[294] Similar initiatives are under way in Estonia.[295]

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[291] And was widely misreported at the time. See 'Army sets up new brigade "for information age"', BBC News, 31 January 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-31070114?print=true; Alistair Bunkall, 'Cyber Warfare: Army Creates "Twitter Troops"', Sky News, 31 January 2015, http://news.sky.com/story/1418376/cyber-warfare-army-creates-twitter-troops. Also compare with Keir Giles, '"Information Troops" – a Russian Cyber Command?', in Christian Czosseck, Enn Tyugu and Thomas Wingfield (eds), *2011 3rd International Conference on Cyber Conflict*, NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, June 2011.

[292] 'Hybrid threats: perceptions and responses', International Institute for Strategic Studies.

[293] 'Haglund: Venäjä käy informaatiosotaa – virheelliset uutiset valtiojohdon hyväksymiä' [Haglund: Russia is using information warfare. False news approved by state leadership], Yle, 12 September 2014, http://yle.fi/uutiset/haglund_venaja_kay_informaatiosotaa__virheelliset_uutiset_valtiojohdon_hyvaksymia/7469446. This awareness facilitated Finland's early development as an epicentre of troll hunting; see Jessikka Aro, 'Oletko joutunut Venäjän trolliarmeijan kohteeksi – kerro kokemuksistasi' [Have you become a victim of the Russian troll army? Tell me about your experience], Yle, 15 September 2014, http://yle.fi/uutiset/oletko_joutunut_venajan_trolliarmeijan_kohteeksi__kerro_kokemuksistasi/7470016; and Stina Brännare, 'Tutkija: Verkkosodan takana voi olla Pietarissa sijaitseva trollitehdas' [Researcher: a troll factory in St Petersburg could be behind internet war], Yle, 12 September 2014, http://yle.fi/uutiset/tutkija_verkkosodan_takana_voi_olla_pietarissa_sijaitseva_trollitehdas/7469539.

[294] 'Точки над i' [Dotting the 'i's], LTV, 25 February 2014, http://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/25.02.2015-tochku-nad-i.-igra-slov-latvija-v-informacionnoy-voyne-rossii.id44679/; 'Latvia proposes "alternative" to Russian TV propaganda', EurActiv, 8 January 2015, http://www.euractiv.com/sections/global-europe/latvia-proposes-alternative-russian-tv-propaganda-311109.

[295] 'Ümarlaud: Vene propaganda vastu võitlemise asemel tuleb pakkuda alternatiivi' [Round table: providing an alternative instead of combating Russian propaganda], Postimees, 18 February 2015, http://www.postimees.ee/3096321/umarlaud-vene-propaganda-vastu-voitlemise-asemel-tuleb-pakkuda-alternatiivi. See also 'ERR's new Russian-language TV channel will be called ETV+', ERR, 20 April 2015, http://news.err.ee/v/politics/society/1a77dc4b-6405-4c29-b41d-7566fc4e9e70/errs-new-russian-language-tv-channel-will-be-called-etv.

Another countermeasure against misuse of Russian external media that is already available in a number of European countries consists of national legislation or regulations designed to ensure that information carried in the media is reliable and objective. In the case of the United Kingdom, this is overseen by the communications regulator, Ofcom. Russia's RT, striving hard to be neither reliable nor objective, has been the subject of scrutiny by Ofcom;[296] but these and national instruments in other countries, whether governmental or independent, have the potential to be applied far more assertively.

In particular, media reporting that RT has been 'sanctioned' by Ofcom is misleading.[297] Despite RT routinely taking up a significant portion of the regulator's investigations and adjudications,[298] the 'sanction' can be no more than a ruling that RT has committed 'unfairness', with no meaningful punishment or countermeasures resulting. In addition, Ofcom rulings reveal a significant problem in assessing the impact of RT. They show that the regulator is under the impression that UK media consumers are fully aware of what RT is and what it is doing – in other words, that they are aware that RT is owned by TV-Novosti and hence the Russian state, and that they therefore expect RT to be promoting a Russian agenda. Given RT's efforts to conceal its origins, including renaming itself to drop the word 'Russia', it is bafflingly optimistic for Ofcom to state that 'viewers would have expected programmes on the channel [...] to do so from the perspective of TV Novosti, reflecting major global events from a Russian perspective'.[299]

In addition, in some cases, due to the international nature of ownership of many media outlets – including those directly funded by Russia – any legal response to media disinformation requires coordination on an international level. At present, restricting RT's operations in one EU country, for instance Latvia, does not prevent it from expanding into another, for instance Ireland.[300]

Given the extensive list of individuals and organizations subjected to EU and North American sanctions for facilitating hostile action against Ukraine, it is difficult at first sight to explain why RT, with its fervent campaigning in support of Russian actions, has not also been subjected to sanctions. Public frustration in the United Kingdom at apparent inaction to counter RT and other subversive media has led to the creation of a petition calling on parliament to amend existing legislation in order to allow action to be taken.[301] Hesitancy in appearing to target free media should be offset by recognition that RT and similar outlets are not free media, nor does their programming constitute journalism.

[296] Jim Waterson, 'Russia Today Faces UK Investigation Over MH17 News Coverage', BuzzFeed, 22 July 2014, http://www.buzzfeed.com/jimwaterson/russia-today-faces-uk-investigation-over-mh17-news-coverage; Chris Johnston and John Plunkett, 'Russia Today launches UK version in new soft power onslaught', *Observer*, 2 November 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/nov/02/russia-today-launch-uk-version-investigations-ofcom.
[297] 'RT sanctioned by Ofcom over series of misleading and biased articles', *Guardian*, 21 September 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/sep/21/rt-sanctioned-over-series-of-misleading-articles-by-media-watchdog.
[298] As, for example, in 'Ofcom Broadcast Bulletins', most recently at the time of writing No. 288, Ofcom, 21 September 2015, http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/enforcement/broadcast-bulletins/obb288/Issue_288.pdf.
[299] Ibid., p. 21.
[300] 'Russia Today not welcome in Latvia', LSM, 28 August 2015, http://www.lsm.lv/en/article/societ/society/russia-today-not-welcome-in-latvia.a143336/; Jason Corcoran and Joe Brennan, 'Putin Said to Open Irish Front Against "Anglo-Saxon" News', Bloomberg, 30 July 2015, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-07-30/putin-said-to-open-irish-front-against-anglo-saxon-news.
[301] Petition, 'Amend the Broadcasting Act: Enable action against hostile State media', UK Parliament, undated, https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/120624.

6. Policy Implications

Although this paper has focused on two specific aspects of the challenge from Russia – military and information warfare capabilities – the implications of developments in these fields spread into many more domains. This chapter is therefore divided into six separate sections, covering politics, military aspects of defence, strategic communications and media, intelligence and assessment, cyber and information security, and deterrence.

Political

In the words of a former commander of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, Admiral Igor Kasatonov, the fact that 'in Crimea, NATO intelligence slept through everything forgivable and unforgivable' was assisted by the 'wide range of disinformation measures' undertaken by Russia to conceal the true nature of the operation.[302] This seems to be an unfair charge: according to more than one well-informed individual, Russian preparations for the seizure of Crimea were noted and reported on by the intelligence structures of NATO member states. The lack of response resulted instead from a lack of perception at a political level of a clear rationale for any specific course of action.

This should not be allowed to happen again, especially if Russia's next assertive action is against a state to which Western treaty obligations are clearer, for example a member of NATO or of the EU. Nevertheless, according to a Lithuanian assessment:

> We cannot rule out that Russia may resort to the measures against one of the Alliance's members in hopes that NATO would not be able to respond in due time and manner due to the complicated decision-making mechanism and differing interests of member-states.[303]

The reason for this doubt over the capabilities of NATO's decision-making structure lies in the consensus principle that ensures that in order for action to be taken, all 28 (and shortly 29) members need to agree there is a problem. According to one senior NATO insider speaking in early 2015, in the years since the end of the Cold War, the lack of existential decisions meant that 'complacency had become the norm' within NATO Headquarters, reflected in the restriction of SACEUR's power to take independent decisions. The suggestion that NATO does not have plans to defend against Russia, because in NATO writing a plan is a political act, gives an indication of the magnitude of the political and organizational challenge.[304] But, this official added, it was now recognized that a three-week decision cycle was not fit for purpose, and work was now under way so

[302] 'Адмирал РФ похвастался захватом Крыма: "Разведка НАТО прозевала все, что можно"' [Russian admiral boasts about the annexation of Crimea: 'NATO intelligence missed everything it possibly could'], *Zerkalo Nedeli*, 13 March 2015, http://zn.ua/UKRAINE/v-krymu-razvedka-nato-prozevala-vse-chto-mozhno-rossiyskiy-admiral-pohvastalsya-zahvatom-poluostrova-169710_.html.
[303] 'Russia may resort to "hidden military measures" against NATO member – report', Delfi, 30 March 2015, http://m.en.delfi.lt/article.php?id=67572020.
[304] As discussed at US Army Europe (USAREUR) Commander's Conference, Grafenwöhr, Germany, 24 August 2015.

that there are no more 'cold starts' every time action is required, and so that the rapid addressing of important decisions becomes 'the norm not a nuisance'.[305]

Since the defences needed against the current threats are civic, economic and administrative as well as military, the EU too must address its responsibilities for European security. EU institutions should continue to be the lead agencies supporting economic, judicial and law enforcement reform in Central and Eastern Europe. Their role in energy security is also crucial. While much attention has been paid to the prospect of direct military intervention in Russia's neighbours, it has to be remembered that this is not the only way Russia can dominate them: arranging a change of government to one that favours Russian interests would be even more effective. Put another way, 'Sub Article 5 interventions need resilience, not troops.'[306]

But EU competencies in capacity-building require a higher security profile and closer coordination with NATO than exists at present.[307] Despite regular promises of closer cooperation between NATO's 2,000 staff and the EU's 30,000 (the majority of them from both organizations located in the same city), little visible progress has been made on key issues and the same important areas of collaboration are being advocated again and again.[308] Little sense of urgency is evident; but as one informed analyst from a front-line state has observed, in order to foster better cooperation against the common threat, each country should imagine what its region would look like if Russia were to succeed against one of its neighbours.

Military

NATO's preparations for what it describes as hybrid threats are progressing as well as they can, given the nature of the organization and the fact that many of these threats do not sit within its competencies. Instead the EU should play a leading role in capacity-building and civil and state resilience in a number of key areas, as described above. But it is vital that NATO members should not be seduced by the fashion for 'hybrid' into thinking that high-end warfighting capability can be neglected: an important element of Russia's supposedly 'hybrid' campaign in Ukraine was the presence, and eventual use, of significant conventional military assets. As the capability of those assets continues to increase, it is essential that NATO nations continue to offer a credible conventional deterrent as well as closing off opportunities for unconventional approaches.

One notional purpose of NATO's VJTF – defence of the Baltic states – raises serious questions over how the force would actually be delivered there.[309] Despite the availability of a small amount of (primarily US) military equipment already delivered to the Baltic states, in order to reach these three countries any forces seeking to protect them would have to run the gauntlet of Russian naval

[305] Author's discussion with senior NATO official, March 2015.
[306] Former first deputy minister of foreign affairs of the Czech Republic Jiří Schneider, speaking at Warsaw Security Forum, November 2014.
[307] As described in Peter Pindják, 'Deterring hybrid warfare: a chance for NATO and the EU to work together?', NATO Review, undated, http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2014/Also-in-2014/Deterring-hybrid-warfare/EN/index.htm.
[308] 'NATO Officials Sing "We Are the World" at Summit in Turkey', *New York Times*, 14 May 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/15/world/europe/nato-officials-sing-we-are-the-world-at-summit-in-turkey.html; 'Chairman of the NATO Military Committee: EU capabilities could complement NATO's military efforts', NATO, 20 October 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_124125.htm.
[309] See, for example, Michael H. Clemmesen, 'To Protect the Baltic States against Russia', author's blog, 20 February 2015, http://blog.clemmesen.org/2015/02/20/to-protect-the-baltic-states-against-russia/.

and air forces in the Baltic Sea, and shore-based air and sea anti-access and area denial (A2AD) weapons systems in Kaliningrad, when Russia has for several years been conducting exercises practising for precisely this scenario.[310] Russia's 2015 Maritime Doctrine states the ambition to 'develop and deploy advanced equipment to enable Russia to make up for lost ground [in capability terms against its rivals] and to become superior to them in certain areas'. The effective ranges of Russia's S-400 (SA-21 Growler) surface-to-air missiles, Iskander short-range ballistic missiles and Bastion coastal defence missile system reach deep into the territories of a number of states in the region. Moreover, Russian operations in Syria confirm earlier assessments that S-400 systems can be deployed in new locations in a matter of hours. Their use in the Baltic region would not only impede theatre entry for NATO forces, it would also compromise the ability of countries like Finland and the Baltic states to operate within, and over, their homelands. One-third of Poland and substantial parts of the territories of other NATO members and partners are under Russian integrated air defence system (IADS) coverage.[311]

The reach of air defence systems from within Russia would suggest that air support and transport for the Baltic states would be impossible without the use of airbases, or at the very least airspace, in Sweden and especially Finland. The notion that, in a crisis, airbases currently used for NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission (Ämari in Estonia and Zokniai/Šiauliai in Lithuania) would be reinforced with front-line NATO aircraft appears misplaced: not only are these bases well within the range of Russian air defence missile systems, but they are largely unprotected against air, ground or missile attack. In particular, they both lack usable hardened aircraft shelters (HAS). To carry out operations in the area, NATO aircraft would therefore need to transit from Western Europe or Scandinavia, with all the tactical and political complications this would entail.

The reinforcement of Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea as an outpost controlling the air and sea approaches to Russia has now been mirrored in Crimea on the Black Sea. With A2AD capabilities in place in both regions, Russia would be in a position to exploit any regional crisis, whether manufactured or not, by declaring air and sea exclusion zones on the pretext of preventing military escalation. Hence any NATO decision to deploy the VJTF and associated assets must be a military rather than a political one in order to minimize delay and Russian influence on the decision-making process. But if, through fortuitous timing, the VJTF were to be successfully delivered to its destination before active conflict began, the question would remain as to its value as a deterrent if Russia had already decided that the benefits of confronting NATO outweighed the risks. The 5,000-strong force has been described as the 'tip of the spear'; but Russia is fully aware of the vestigial nature of warfighting capability among most European countries, and that the tip is of little use without the haft of the spear behind it. In this context, among many other analogies, the force has been referred to as a 'tripwire', a 'token', or even 'hostages', and parallels drawn with the Cold War's Berlin Brigade.

Few other comparisons with the Cold War are possible. The differences in scale between the military commitment required by NATO before 1989 to deter the Soviet Union and that now under

[310] Richard Fontaine and Julianne Smith, 'Anti-Access/Area Denial Isn't Just for Asia Anymore', Defense One, 2 April 2015, http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2015/04/anti-accessarea-denial-isnt-just-asia-anymore/109108/print/; Pauli Järvenpää, 'Zapad-2013 - A View From Helsinki', Jamestown Foundation, August 2014.
[311] Gorenc, 'USAFE-AFAFRICA Update'.

consideration to deter Russia highlight the token nature of measures undertaken to date. The challenges faced by the US Army in Europe are indicative. During the Cold War, the United States had 300,000 troops in Europe, with 250,000 of them defending West Germany alone. At the time of writing, that force numbers 27,000, but is intended to help defend a vastly extended front from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. In addition, as part of the US force drawdown from Europe, a number of key capabilities for conventional warfighting are no longer immediately available. In mid-2015, there was only one US engineer battalion remaining in Europe, and no bridging equipment – hence the need to practise interoperability with allies such as Hungary, including borrowing their bridges.[312] With only 16 heavy-equipment transporters (HETs) remaining in Europe – essential for moving, for example, main battle tanks – US forces were in the unusual position of facing an equipment deficit compared to the British Army, with its 40 HETs available locally.[313]

Most strikingly of all, in mid-2015 US forces in Europe lacked organic short-range air defence (SHORAD) systems in theatre, and like many allied forces would have relied on local air superiority for protection until their arrival from the United States. But the assumption of air superiority has now been called into question for forward deployments. According to US Air Force General Frank Gorenc, the commander of US Air Forces in Europe and Africa, Russia's military modernization programme means that US air superiority is no longer assured. 'They have closed the gap [...] They learned a lot along the way, and they made moves to close the asymmetric advantage posed by the quality of our air force; they've done it.'[314] According to one assessment, recovering superiority in Baltic airspace, including by suppressing Russian air defences, would require a campaign of weeks for which the stocks of munitions are no longer available in Europe. The problem is compounded by the fact that by contrast with NATO's Western members, Russia and even Belarus, the Baltic states and Poland lack rocket artillery systems, meaning that the longest-range indirect fire system available there can reach only 40 kilometres.

In the meantime, a substantial part of improving the readiness of NATO forces in Europe involves relearning skills which have been of limited or no relevance to the past decades of expeditionary warfare. The bilateral training programmes under way for Ukrainian forces are also feeding back information on Russian operational approaches and military capability to the trainers. Key lessons include the necessity for allies to train and prepare for substantial Russian electronic warfare (EW) capability, with the implication that they may have to operate in a degraded EW/cyber environment, with GPS signals suppressed or unreliable;[315] to relearn what it means to be under concentrated hostile artillery bombardment; and to invest in countermeasures for being swarmed by Russian drones.

[312] Juana Nesbitt, 'Stryker Regiment begins Exercise Dragoon Crossing', US Army, 14 September 2015, http://www.army.mil/article/155371/Stryker_Regiment_begins_Exercise_Dragoon_Crossing__Series_Part_1_of_4_/.
[313] Figures presented at US Army Europe (USAREUR) Commander's Conference, Grafenwöhr, Germany, 24 August 2015.
[314] Marina Malenic, 'AFA 2015: Russia has closed air power gap with NATO, US warns', *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, 16 September 2015, http://www.janes.com/article/54311/afa-2015-russia-has-closed-air-power-gap-with-nato-us-warns.
[315] Joe Gould, 'Electronic Warfare: What US Army Can Learn From Ukraine', Defense News, 2 August 2015, http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/warfare/2015/08/02/us-army-ukraine-russia-electronic-warfare/30913397/; Bill Sweetman, 'Opinion: Russian Innovations Point To New EW Doctrine', *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, 11 September 2015, http://aviationweek.com/defense/opinion-russian-innovations-point-new-ew-doctrine.

Strategic communications and media

In 2011, an in-depth report published by Chatham House identified scope for substantial improvement in strategic communications policy and implementation by Western governments, and by the United Kingdom in particular, even before these governments were subjected to the current pressures of sustained hostile information campaigning.[316] Now that hostile information warfare poses a direct challenge, there is an urgent requirement to put the 'strategic' back into communications, both by setting clear and unified strategic goals and priorities, and by recognizing the vital importance of communicating effectively both to a nation's domestic population and to the adversary. As an article in *The Economist* put it in March 2015, 'Europe risks underplaying the potency of the disinformation threat. Fact-checking and networking initiatives can carry you only so far; Europe must act as well as react.'[317]

During the Cold War, the strategy to defeat Soviet propaganda was built on two key principles: first, let an open society speak for itself; and second, expose the liar without worrying about every particular lie. Whether this remains applicable in the conditions of hyperconnectivity exploited by Russia to reach Western populations directly and on a broad front is questionable. But responses to information warfare need to mirror some of the technical approaches adopted by Russia, while steering clear of the temptation to mimic disinformation and propaganda.

Just like the Russian offensive, Western responses need to be tailored and tiered to specific audiences, by medium and by level of intellectual engagement. Telling the truth is not enough; the message needs to be accessible, which means making it less cerebral where necessary. This would appear obvious; the fact that 'it is essential to focus on effects, audience and influence in order to determine the most appropriate and effective medium'[318] should not even need to be stated. But to date this does not appear to have happened.

As noted above, recognition by individual media that their objectivity and independence are being subverted by Russian disinformation and troll campaigns has not generally translated into a coordinated response. Here, national-level assistance would be of great value to media editors seeking to resist the process. National strategic communications should be defensive, as well as outgoing, and in particular support should be provided to media wishing to assess the veracity or otherwise of Russian claims. Defensive functions should also include tracking and hindering the propagation of Russian disinformation into the policy-making environment. In both of these areas there is scope for cooperation at a supranational level by – and between – NATO and the EU. At present, however, this role is largely filled by voluntary or private-sector organizations such as The Interpreter or Bellingcat, leaving liberal media editors still hostage to the imperative of 'balance'.[319]

[316] Paul Cornish, Julian Lindley-French and Claire Yorke, *Strategic Communications and National Strategy*, Chatham House Report, September 2011, https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/178465.
[317] 'Aux armes, journalistes!', *The Economist*, 21 March 2015, http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21646756-europe-belatedly-waking-up-russias-information-warfare-aux-armes-journalistes?fsrc=scn/tw_ec/aux_armes_journalistes_.
[318] Cornish et al., *Strategic Communications and National Strategy*.
[319] See http://www.interpretermag.com/about-us/ and https://www.bellingcat.com/tag/russia/.

At the beginning of 2015, a group of EU member states asked the European External Action Service to take action on specific countermeasures to Russian information warfare.[320] There is scope also for a wide range of important secondary objectives, such as countering the deleterious economic effect on the region of constant reporting of the Baltic states as the next target for Russian aggression. In addition to providing information support at a national level and legislative coordination at a supranational level (mirroring Ukraine's belated efforts to organize resistance to Russian information warfare operations),[321] the EU was asked to update its own communications. This reflected the assessment that it needs to move away from providing inaccessible messages through 'antiquated delivery channels' and take full advantage of contemporary media techniques in order to achieve impact and resonance with target populations.[322] But concrete responses by the EU have been painfully slow and limited. Following an objective set in March 2015 to provide an 'action plan on strategic communication in support of media freedom and EU values', the response by the EU in August was the creation of a group of 'up to 10' officials.[323] The mismatch in scale between the problem and the EU response needs no further comment.

NATO, too, has been subjected to severe and justified criticism for its strategic communication efforts. In August 2015, the inaugural conference hosted by NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Latvia heard from a succession of speakers, including NATO officials, how the alliance's communication efforts lag far behind not only the techniques used by Russia, but also those employed by communications campaigns in politics and business.[324] The challenges, according to one expert, are both conceptual and structural:

> Currently NATO StratCom is under resourced (with people), does not appear to enjoy the confidence of the military command structure in the way that more obvious military power does and is probably vested in the wrong part of NATO – namely in Public Diplomacy not the International Military Staff. It also seems distracted by an unhealthy focus on social media and reputation protection [...] Currently NATO 'communicates in an appropriate, timely, accurate and responsive manner on its evolving roles, objectives and missions'. A small but necessary change should be: 'communicates in an appropriate, timely, accurate and responsive manner to achieve its evolving roles, objectives and missions'.[325]

National and independent external broadcasters in the West have been presented with a different problem. Deutsche Welle, the BBC World Service, Radio Free Europe and others have been tasked with reaching Russian audiences in order to counter the alternative reality established in the Russian media space, with particular reference to Russian combat operations in Ukraine. For

[320] Valentina Pop, 'Nato colonel sheds light on Russia "psy-ops"', EUobserver, 22 January 2015, https://euobserver.com/foreign/127174. See also 'Lithuania, UK, Denmark and Estonia call for EU plan against Russian propaganda', Delfi, 9 January 2015, http://en.delfi.lt/archive/article.php?id=66857976; and 'Estonia, Lithuania, UK, Denmark call for EU action on Russian information warfare; Latvia refuses to join', *Baltic Times*, 15 January 2015, http://www.baltictimes.com/estonia__lithuania__uk__denmark_call_for_eu_action_on_russian_information_warfare__latvia_refuses_to_join/.
[321] Olga Kortunova, 'Информационная война: "идти на грозу"' [Information War: 'All-Out Offensive'], Tema, 2 March 2015, http://tema.in.ua/print/8858.html.
[322] Andrew Rettman, 'UK, Denmark back EU counter-propaganda plan', EUobserver, 9 January 2015, https://euobserver.com/foreign/127155.
[323] Jan Strupczewski, 'EU leaders want to tackle Russian "disinformation" on Ukraine war', *Daily Mail*, 11 March 2015, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-2990243/EU-leaders-want-tackle-Russian-disinformation-Ukraine-war.html; 'Latvia's priority – strengthening the EU's strategic communication capacity – receives backing from the European Council', Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Latvia, 21 March 2015, http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/45521-latvia-s-priority-strengthening-the-eu-s-strategic-communication-capacity-receives-backing-from-the-european-council; James Panichi, 'EU declares information war on Russia', Politico Europe, 27 August 2015, http://www.politico.eu/article/russia-propaganda-ukraine-eu-response-disinformation/.
[324] Details and publications at http://www.stratcomcoe.org/
[325] Steve Tatham, *The Solution to Russian Propaganda is not EU or NATO Propaganda but Advanced Social Science to Understand and Mitigate its Effect in Targeted Populations*, National Defence Academy of Latvia, April 2015.

Western military forces, media consciousness is an integral part of operational planning. This is due to the recognition that the proliferation of mass media and instant communications has made it 'possible for the citizens of a nation to scrutinise the conduct of war by their military forces [leading to] the possibility of a public opinion directly impacting the political decision-making of a nation'.[326] But today this is an asymmetric vulnerability since it applies to Western liberal democracies with a free media, but not – as conclusively demonstrated by events around Ukraine – to Russia.

Consequently, state broadcasters are under considerable pressure by their funding governments to 'do something' in order to fulfil their mission of communicating external reality to the Russian media audience. In doing so they face new challenges. During the Cold War, when these broadcasters last faced a similar requirement, the primary method of delivery was short-wave radio. But today, even if potential listeners still possessed short-wave receivers, the cost and complication of regenerating this kind of broadcast capability would render it unfeasible. Meanwhile, the rebroadcasting licences that were issued in Russia during an earlier period of free media cooperation, allowing foreign broadcasts on FM in major cities, have been revoked or not renewed. In 2016, the notion of foreign broadcasters being allowed the kind of access to the Russian media market that RT enjoys in the West seems impossibly remote.[327] In Russian doctrine, any such access that provides an alternative to the official state version of events is interpreted as being immediately and directly hostile.[328]

Finally, an effective Western response to the Russian challenge demands resolve by national governments to be frank with their electorates about the nature of the problem and to recognize that the age of peace dividends is over. This requires the ability and courage to articulate the strategic rationale for prioritizing, or failing to prioritize, national security in funding rounds. Besides its direct impact on defence and security capability, the United Kingdom's 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review also provided a medium for strategic messaging. Regardless of the severe constraints placed on the previous review in 2010, it had created the impression that the United Kingdom was not serious about defending itself or its European allies. The new iteration in 2015 provided an opportunity for communicating both to Russia and to the British public that the opposite is true.

Nevertheless, in Western Europe, economic challenges continue to be prioritized over external threats; in other words, governments continue to recognize only the threats they think they can afford. This may be a dangerously short-sighted approach. As put by Jan Techau:

> The costs of preserving freedom and peace in Europe [...] are relatively modest, considering the alternative, even though they might appear painfully high in a European political environment that in mid-2015 is almost exclusively concerned with its economic survival. But with a wider strategic neighborhood as conflict-ridden as Europe's, focusing on the economy alone might ultimately be a rather costly attitude.[329]

[326] Kainikara, 'Air Power in the Information Age', p. 3.
[327] Keir Giles, 'The information war: how Moscow controls access to Western media', *The World Today*, August–September 2015, p. 19.
[328] Vyacheslav Nechayev, 'США вводят информационные войска в российские социальные сети' [The US is sending its information troops into Russian social networks], *Izvestiya*, 14 April 2015, http://izvestia.ru/news/585366.
[329] Jan Techau, 'The Politics of 2 Percent: NATO and the Security Vacuum in Europe', Atlantic Council, 4 September 2015, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/the-politics-of-2-percent-nato-and-the-security-vacuum-in-europe.

Intelligence and assessment

A deep understanding of Russia's distinctive security calculus and threat picture is critical for mitigating future confrontation. Russia, if presented with a threat or an opportunity, will tailor its response to circumstance.[330] But this is not to say that its likely actions cannot be predicted, or at the very least identified at an early stage. The multiple reports predicting a Russian move on Crimea, as cited above, were not outlying lucky guesses. A UK parliamentary report in 2009 noted:

> Many of our witnesses stressed that Russia poses a military threat to other former Soviet states, particularly in light of its actions in Georgia [...] Some witnesses argued that Russia posed a military threat to Ukraine [...] one scenario was that Putin could send in military forces to secure the Russian military base at Sevastopol.[331]

And as long ago as 2007, even before the Georgian conflict, an EU study highlighted the incompatibility of the EU approach to Ukraine with Russia's stated security interests. It recommended that 'as a matter of urgency the EU needs to think over its foreign policies in the Eastern Neighbourhood with great care, bearing in mind their impact on relations with Russia, as well as Moscow's possible response'.[332]

This reliable assessment of the options that appear rational to Russia requires a cadre of deep expertise. But in both the United States and Western Europe, a process of continuing attrition since the 1990s has led to a severe shortage of analysts and experts working within or for government who can explain the workings of Russia.[333] The result, as highlighted in three separate British parliamentary committee reports,[334] is that the intelligence and analysis capability to predict and pre-empt triggers for aggressive Russian action is simply no longer available.[335] The loss of analytical depth and institutional memory has also compromised the West's ability not only to examine Russia's intentions and aspirations – and the capabilities built in order to achieve them – but also to look back at what has and has not been learned from previous confrontations. In addition, a deficit of language capability means a lack of access to original Russian documents and comment; such access is essential for proper comprehension of very specific nuances and implications.[336]

Furthermore, within the intelligence domain, the old-style indicators and warnings of imminent military activity no longer pertain. In conditions of ongoing intensive activity by the Russian armed

[330] 'What does Hybrid Warfare mean to Europe? Four experts weigh in', European Leadership Network, 21 January 2015, http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/what-does-hybrid-warfare-mean-to-europe-four-experts-weigh-in_2034.html.
[331] 'Russia: a new confrontation?', UK House of Commons Defence Committee, 10 July 2009.
[332] Vsevolod Samokhvalov, *Relations in the Russia-Ukraine-EU triangle: 'zero-sum game' or not?*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, September 2007, p. 3.
[333] Jason Horowitz, 'Russia Experts See Thinning Ranks' Effect on U.S. Policy', *New York Times*, 6 March 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/07/world/europe/american-experts-on-russia.html.
[334] 'Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part Two—NATO', UK House of Commons Defence Committee, 22 July 2014; 'Russia: a new confrontation?', UK House of Commons Defence Committee; and 'The EU and Russia: before and beyond the crisis in Ukraine', UK House of Lords European Union Committee, 20 February 2015.
[335] Joe Gould, 'Breedlove: Russia Intel Gaps "Critical"', Defense News, 30 April 2015, http://defnews.ly/1zuKCAX.
[336] James Coomarasamy, 'UK struggles with language of Russian diplomacy', BBC News, 16 March 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-31856880?print=true.

forces since early 2014, as described by intelligence analysts from more than one NATO nation, 'all the indicators went to red and just stayed there'.[337]

This lack of capacity and understanding threatens to limit Western nations to responding to Russia's current approach or most recent action, and remaining reactive instead of addressing problems in advance. But steps can be taken to limit the analytical deficit. It remains the case that the front-line states, with their significantly higher threat perception, continue to invest in studying and assessing Russia. Some of the results are shared with allies through the NATO Intelligence Fusion Centre (NIFC) in the United Kingdom; but given the substantial history of accurate analysis and prediction of Russia on the basis of open sources, there remains much greater scope for useful officially sponsored collaboration outside an intelligence setting. It has been argued that 'ubiquitous, useful and unclassified (U3) information' is a key enabler in understanding and predicting Russian moves, with a primary example being the use of preparatory disinformation and propaganda campaigns in social media ahead of a change of policy or new initiative by Moscow. If this is the case, enhanced cooperation on open-source collection and interpretation would also assist in correcting for any tendency to overprivilege secret intelligence compared to other indicators of intent.[338]

NATO's network of Centres of Excellence provides one framework for this collaboration, but a limited one. A large number of informal networks of expertise on Russia already exist, but a more structured and integrated approach is needed. A deliberate effort to sponsor and record the ongoing analysis and conclusions from multinational academic, policy and commercial assessments of Russia specifically for the purposes of national security would substantially mitigate the lack of governmental in-house expertise.

The potential benefits are not limited to military analysis. Better coordination against Russian espionage, corruption and organized crime, better sharing of financial intelligence, and intensified cooperation among criminal justice systems would help address some of the non-military threats emanating from Russia. Importantly, the front-line states are also well placed to assess and warn on what constitutes indicators of a raised threat level in these spheres.

None of these measures address the problem that even if Russia's next step is predicted with total accuracy, responding to such a prediction will still require a political initiative. Nevertheless, an investment in understanding and foreseeing Russia's next paroxysm still constitutes an investment in the future security of Europe.[339]

Cyber and information security

The Ukraine conflict has the potential to bring about a transformative effect within cyber doctrine. Unlike Russia's expansive and integrated campaigning, the siloed Western approach to cyber security has typically focused on technical responses to technical threats, largely disregarding the

[337] Anonymous conversations with author, August–December 2014.
[338] Josh Kerbel, 'The U.S. Intelligence Community Wants Disruptive Change As Long As It's Not Disruptive', War on the Rocks, 20 January 2016, http://warontherocks.com/2016/01/the-u-s-intelligence-community-wants-disruptive-change-as-long-as-its-not-disruptive/.
[339] Keir Giles, 'Staring down a grizzly Russia', *The World Today*, April–May 2014.

interface with information warfare in the broad sense. This approach is entirely apt for persistent or background threats, but probably insufficient for when a national security crisis emerges, since at that point there will be no such thing as a 'pure cyber' confrontation. In other words, the West may have been well prepared for cyber war, but events in Ukraine show that it also needs to be prepared for information war when cyber operations are used as a facilitator or attack vector.

This has specific implications for information security in advance of any broader confrontation with Russia, as well as during it. Examples are already available of Russian information operations targeting individuals from the armed forces of NATO nations visiting the front-line states. These take a range of forms, and have so far included false reporting that named individuals had been arrested for raping children in Kyiv, and direct intimidatory approaches to servicemen in Latvia by Russian intelligence officers reeling off details of their personal lives harvested from incautious social media posts. What this demonstrates is that Russia watches which individuals from the militaries of NATO nations are posted within its easy reach, and has practised exploiting their vulnerabilities. Russia deploys equipment in eastern Ukraine and elsewhere which not only filters the information available to internet users, blocking access to a range of websites and replacing them with Russian sources, but also harvests data from personal electronic devices.[340] Combined with the demonstrated capability of trolling on an industrial scale, this poses a potential challenge if at a moment of crisis large numbers of servicemen and civilian officials are simultaneously targeted.

Operations against Ukraine in the 'pure cyber' domain represent an evolution in Russian tactics compared to previous campaigns. In part, this is due to Ukraine's very different cyber terrain. Comparisons to Russia's rudimentary cyber efforts at the time of the Georgian conflict in 2008 are of limited value. Unlike Georgia, Ukraine's more interconnected nature makes it impossible to restrict access to the internet overall, except in the very special case of the Crimean peninsula. But in addition, there is no reason why Russia should try to do so, especially given the integrated nature of Ukrainian and Russian information space. Since Russia already enjoyed a significant degree of control over Ukrainian cyberspace, including through telecommunications companies, infrastructure and overlapping networks, there was little incentive to disrupt it. In short, Russia had no need to attack what it already controlled.[341] To give one simplistic but indicative example, little offensive cyber effort is needed for Russia to access sensitive Ukrainian email traffic when so many Ukrainians, including government officials, use Russian mail services and therefore provide automatic access to the Russian security and intelligence services.[342]

A distinctive aspect of information operations in Ukraine itself, and one with important implications for how cyber war may be waged in future, is the way Russian activity in the cyber domain facilitates broader information warfare aims. This manifests itself not only in straightforward spearphishing of Ukrainian officials for exploitation, but also in specific uses of

[340] 'Army busts internet provider blocking access to Ukrainian websites, TV in east', Interfax-Ukraine, 6 January 2016. See also 'Ukrainian troops find jamming device in Luhansk Region', Interfax-Ukraine, 2 January 2016. See also Keir Giles, 'The Next Phase in Russian Information Warfare', NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, November 2015.
[341] Patrick Tucker, 'Why Ukraine Has Already Lost The Cyberwar, Too', Defense One, 28 April 2014, http://www.defenseone.com/technology/2014/04/why-ukraine-has-already-lost-cyberwar-too/83350/print/.
[342] Anna Poludenko-Young, 'Ukrainian Officials, Russian Security Services Thank You for Your Cooperation!', Global Voices, 23 May 2015, http://globalvoicesonline.org/2015/05/23/ukrainian-officials-russian-security-services-thank-you-for-your-cooperation/.

malware in the conflict.[343] A particular example is the redirection of malware originally intended for cyber crime to manipulating viewer figures to promote pro-Russian online video clips.[344] But potentially even more significant for the nature of future cyber operations is the new interface between cyber and kinetic operations.

When Russia wished to isolate Crimea from news from the outside world, no sophisticated cyber exploits were required. Instead, special operations forces detachments simply took over the Simferopol internet exchange point (IXP), and elsewhere selectively disrupted cable connections to the Ukrainian mainland.[345] Russia's consequent total information dominance of the region, and accompanying information campaigns including such basic measures as speeches at rallies, ensured that significant sections of Crimean society were happy to welcome Russian troops because they were 'convinced that bandits and fascists were coming from Kiev to kill them'.[346] In short, complex and expensive information weapons are entirely unnecessary in situations where the adversary can gain physical control of infrastructure and embeds telecommunications engineering expertise with its special forces in order to exploit it.

The circumstances of Crimea were unique, and not only because of the peninsula's distinctive internet geography; but Russian planners will have noted the striking success in gaining information control over the region, and will be looking for where it can be applied elsewhere. There are two important implications for planning for future crises with Russia. First, civil and military contingency planning should include scenarios in which friendly access to the internet is degraded or absent. Second, civilian internet infrastructure – including exchange points, satellites and their base stations, and undersea cables and their termination points – needs at least as much defence and protection as other strategic assets.[347]

Deterrence

If the West is to uphold its values, defending the front-line states from Russia must be a primary responsibility. The task of NATO in particular is to maintain security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area irrespective of what might occur inside Russia. Ensuring equal security for allies regardless of whether they are next door to Russia or not is the foundation of this task, and it cannot be made conditional upon Russia's consent.

It follows that the United Kingdom and other Western countries should take a forward-leaning posture to prevent Russia 'opportunistically press[ing] chaos deep into the Euro-Atlantic system,

[343] PowerPoint presentation by SBU (Security Service of Ukraine), 'В умовах військової агресії з боку Російської Федерації, війна ведеться не лише на землі, в повітрі та в дипломатичних колах, вперше в історії війн застосовані нові форми ведення агресії – гібридна війна з використанням кіберпростору України' [In terms of Russian military aggression, the war is not only on land, in the air and in diplomatic circles – for the first time in the history of warfare there is a new form of aggression – hybrid warfare using Ukrainian cyberspace], undated. See also Kenneth Geers, 'Strategic Analysis: As Russia-Ukraine Conflict Continues, Malware Activity Rises', FireEye, 28 May 2014, https://www.fireeye.com/blog/threat-research/2014/05/strategic-analysis-as-russia-ukraine-conflict-continues-malware-activity-rises.html.
[344] Rami Kogan, 'Bedep trojan malware spread by the Angler exploit kit gets political', Trustwave, 29 April 2015, https://www.trustwave.com/Resources/SpiderLabs-Blog/Bedep-trojan-malware-spread-by-the-Angler-exploit-kit-gets-political/.
[345] 'Кримські регіональні підрозділи ПАТ «Укртелеком» офіційно повідомляють про блокування невідомими декількох вузлів зв'язку на півострові' [Ukrtelekom officially reports blocking of communications nodes on peninsula by unknown actors], Ukrtelekom, 28 February 2014, http://www.ukrtelecom.ua/presscenter/news/official?id=120327.
[346] Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Linas Linkevičius, speaking at the Lennart Meri Conference, Tallinn 24 April 2015.
[347] For a detailed examination of this topic, see Giles, 'The Next Phase of Russian Information Warfare'.

thereby generating divisions it can exploit to weaken Western power and influence'.[348] As put by Sven Mikser, Estonia's former defence minister: 'We believe that our allies will come to our help. We need Vladimir Putin to believe that too.'[349] The West as a whole must be willing to demonstrate that the resolve to resist Russia – up to and including the point of open conflict – is there. If this demonstration is made, and in a manner and on a scale which is meaningful in Moscow, Russia will back down – just as it always has done throughout Soviet and Russian history.

Precedents are available from a previous period of redrawing of European borders in the last century. At the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union sought to impose on Turkey similar demands to those which had been presented to the Baltic states and Finland at its beginning. On this occasion, however, Britain and the United States made it plain that they would back Turkish resistance. The result of this clear demonstration of resolve was restraint of the Soviet Union, and eventual NATO membership for Turkey. Similarly, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from northern Iran in 1946 was achieved with the assistance of resolute public commitments to Iranian sovereignty by the major Western powers.

At the same time, the relative lack of these commitments in Europe meant that the Soviet Union felt unconstrained in asserting its dominance over the occupied East, by subverting the political systems of the occupied countries to form a subservient bloc. An assessment of this process written in 1953 has direct lessons for today:

> [Western] appeals to democratic principles **not backed by significant military force** merely irritated the Russians without impressing them, the more so since these democratic principles… would have weakened or destroyed Russia's influence in the countries adjacent to its western border.[350]

Similarly, the Western approach today suggests that the greatest concern of leaders is not strategic defeat, but war itself. By broadcasting this fear, and invariably announcing what they will *not* do to protect allies instead of what they will, Western leaders enable President Putin to manipulate them and sow the seeds of future armed conflicts. In March 2014, US President Barack Obama's declaration that there was 'no military solution' to the Ukraine crisis left Putin free to pursue his own military solution with little concern for US responses.[351]

Within this framework, while NATO presents the VJTF, the Readiness Action Plan and Trident Juncture as substantive measures, the limited and tentative nature of the actual reinforcement and pre-positioning undertaken directly within the front-line states sends a message to Russia, but not the one intended. It says that the Western allies are *not* fully and without question committed to honouring their treaty commitments. This in itself, instead of deterring Russia from acting, encourages it towards the conclusion that it can do so in some areas without risking serious consequences. This conclusion is reinforced by strategic communications debacles such as the misguided and irresponsible BBC 'War Room' docudrama in February 2016, which simulated a

[348] 'After Crimea: Towards a New British Geostrategy for Eastern Europe?', Henry Jackson Society, 1 September 2015, http://henryjacksonsociety.org/2015/09/01/after-crimea-towards-a-new-british-geostategy-for-eastern-europe/.
[349] Speaking at Lennart Meri Conference, Tallinn, 22 April 2015.
[350] William Hardy McNeill, *America, Britain and Russia: Their Co-operation and Conflict 1941-1946* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 723. Emphasis added by author.
[351] Jules Witcover, 'Obama rules out military solution on Ukraine', *Chicago Tribune*, 28 March 2014, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2014-03-28/opinion/sns-201403271700--tms--poltodayctnyq-a20140328-20140328_1_president-obama-obama-rules-military-solution.

failure by NATO to defend the Baltic states followed by a refusal by the United Kingdom to use its independent nuclear deterrent.[352] As well as alienating the Baltic states by treating one of their most alarming future scenarios as entertainment, the programme will have been seen in Moscow as direct messaging; regardless of its fiercely defended independence, the BBC is seen in Russia as the mouthpiece of the British government, and its output treated accordingly. In the most optimistic interpretation, the programme was deeply confusing; the Russian public was told that it represented the leaked scenario of a top-secret military exercise, while Latvian reviews were baffled by whether the retired diplomats, servicemen and security officials featured in the programme were in fact actors.[353]

Nevertheless, it is a consistent principle throughout Russia's history that there is only one effective deterrent to its military adventurism: the possession of significant military force, present in visible mass where it is needed, and the demonstrated willingness to use it. It follows that whatever else NATO, the United States, other individual countries or the EU may do to protect members, there is simply no substitute for the forward presence of substantial, credible conventional forces at the alliance's most vulnerable points – to include Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

NATO members feel themselves constrained by the NATO–Russia Founding Act's restrictions on permanent basing in new members. But it is incomprehensible why NATO is still binding itself to a strict interpretation of the Act, which specifically refers to the security situation of the late 1990s and has long been made invalid by Russian aggressive actions in Europe.

The provisions of the Act, and a related desire to avoid the appearance of escalation, lead to verbal contortions by NATO members when describing their reassurance and deterrence measures. The United States in particular wishes to avoid use of the term 'pre-positioned' military equipment. Officially there is no pre-positioned US military equipment in the Baltic states, since pre-positioning implies equipment that will not be used unless there is a crisis. Instead, the equipment there is considered a 'European Activity Set, in use by US Regionally Allocated Forces that conduct training and exercises in the Baltics, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and a few other countries'.

Similarly, the British promise in October 2015 that a small number of servicemen would be deployed to the Baltic states pointedly referred to the deployment as 'persistent' rather than 'permanent'.[354] But this striving for semantic nicety risks being wasted on Moscow, which will be assessing the reality of measures taken regardless of how they are described. In the British case, it is doubly wasted if the promised deployment does not even in fact take place: by February 2016, according to the Estonian and Lithuanian defence ministries, the announcement had not been followed through and no British troops had been 'persistently' deployed to their respective countries.

[352] Annabelle Chapman, 'The BBC's "Inside the War Room" should never have been made', *Prospect*, 3 February 2016, http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/world/bbc-world-war-three-inside-the-war-room-should-not-have-been-made-latvia-donabass-russia-putin.
[353] 'Британия не ответит на ядерный удар России' [Britain will not respond to Russian nuclear strike], Zvezda, 31 January 2016, http://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane_i_mire/content/201601311618-sa53.htm; Ģirts Vikmanis, 'Vai esam gatavi mirt par Daugavpili?' [Are you ready to die for Daugavpils?], LA.lv, 5 February 2016, http://www.la.lv/vai-esam-gatavi-mirt-par-daugavpili/.
[354] 'Defence Secretary announces more support in Baltics and Ukraine', UK Ministry of Defence, 8 October 2015, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secretary-announces-more-support-in-baltics-and-ukraine.

Fears of Russian reactions also need to be qualified. In its public discourse, Russia already equates NATO movements and presence with its own intensive programme of large-scale practice for conventional warfare; according to the Russian version, NATO is already present in force in the front-line states and assuming an aggressive posture. As a result, there is little scope for Russia to present any future actual NATO deployments as a substantively greater threat.

Informed observers of Russia continue to point out that 'for Putin, weakness is more provocative than strength'.[355] President Putin himself agrees. His concern driving Russia's intensive period of military transformation and rearmament was that Russia 'must not tempt anyone by our weakness'.[356] In Russian thinking, conventional military power deficiencies present a temptation and an invitation. Weakness provokes, but readiness deters. Consequently, the relative military vacuum in the Baltic states must urgently be filled by NATO, before Russia is tempted to fill it itself.

If NATO is not willing or able to pre-position sufficient forces in the Baltic states to close off easy opportunities for Russia, then in order to fulfil its function and reason for existence it must be prepared to accept much more costly and politically challenging alternatives.

Until now Russian threats and pressure targeting Sweden and Finland have been counterproductive and have only pushed the two countries closer to NATO – to nobody's surprise except in Moscow.[357] But in a crisis, when the pressure would be immeasurably stronger, is there a guarantee that their airspace could be used by NATO to conduct or facilitate actions which Russia wished to prevent? Otherwise, in the event of hostilities, NATO would be faced with the task of reaching the eastern Baltic by fighting its way past Kaliningrad. If NATO leaders did indeed show the political will to order an operation of that kind, it would inevitably be portrayed as unnecessary escalation by Russia – and that view would have support from wide sectors of European domestic populations and political classes even before the Russian propaganda machine went to work.

In the meantime, there is a direct linear relationship between a smaller NATO presence in the Baltic states and a greater likelihood that some form of military action will seem feasible to Russia. In precisely the same way, Russia's use of its military assets becomes more likely, not less, as they continue to be improved. Two key Russian advantages are speed of decision-making and speed of movement. A lack of forward presence in the Baltic states accentuates these disadvantages for NATO.

So strong NATO forces do need to be visible in the front-line states, and to be provided with appropriate rules of engagement and political pre-authorization to act when needed. This also requires administrative and legislative support in the form of memoranda of understanding, and basing and hosting arrangements, which will allow them to operate without artificial impediments to the movement of troops, equipment and supplies across NATO borders – both during a crisis and beforehand in order to train and demonstrate capability. In June 2015, NATO carried out Exercise

[355] As put by Estonia's Sven Mikser, speaking at Lennart Meri Conference, Tallinn, 22 April 2015.
[356] Vladimir Putin, 'We should not tempt anyone by allowing ourselves to be weak', *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 20 February 2012, http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/18185/print/.
[357] Paul Adams, 'Russian menace pushes Sweden towards Nato', BBC, 4 February 2016, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35456535.

Noble Jump in Poland as part of the process of testing and refining the VJTF.[358] Besides its purely military aspects, the exercise was a substantial achievement in bureaucracy and legal process, with 45 new agreements and memoranda of understanding needing to be completed in order to allow the multinational exercise to proceed.[359]

Issues such as these need to be resolved in advance of a crisis, so that the deployment, supply and movement of NATO troops can be made as seamless as possible in order to match Russian freedom of movement on the other side of the border. In effect, bilateral and multilateral cooperation should by now already have moved on from signing a 'memo of understanding outlining the two armies' shared strategic vision for future bilateral cooperation' to concrete steps to improve defensive capability.[360]

A vital aim for Russia in the event of confrontation must be to fracture NATO cohesion so that NATO's strengths are never brought to bear in unison – because if they are, the results will be decisive. Russian nuclear rhetoric is designed in part to affect this cohesion by seeding the fear that confrontation could lead to nuclear conflict. In this respect, there is also a vested Russian interest in appearing to be a dangerous and irresponsible actor, approaching the concept of nuclear first use with an alarming clarity of conscience. One of the many scenarios mooted for how Russia could cause the political implosion of NATO involves a snap exercise being diverted with some legitimizing pretext into the border area of a front-line state, taking and holding a small slice of territory, digging in and activating an air defence dome, and then announcing that in the event of a counter-attack Russia will use nuclear weapons. NATO nations might then consider that they face a choice between nuclear war, and surrender and the collapse of the entire rationale for the existence of the alliance.

Proponents of this scenario say that it argues for the presence in the front-line states of troops specifically from NATO's nuclear allies, in order to limit Russian options and thus reduce the likelihood of conflict. But if those forces are in place, they not only deny Russia easy conventional military opportunities, but also a whole range of other measures that are currently described as 'hybrid' threats but that rely on there being no robust response from the target country or from NATO.

[358] William Cook, 'If Putin comes, the Poles are waiting - a report from Nato's new frontline', *Spectator*, 4 July 2015, http://www.spectator.co.uk/features/9571202/i-think-ive-watched-the-next-european-war/; 'A "Noble Jump" for NATO's Spearhead Force', NATO Allied Command Transformation Public Affairs Office, 18 June 2015, http://www.act.nato.int/a-noble-jump-for-nato-s-spearhead-force.
[359] Senior NATO naval officer, speaking at NATO Maritime Commanders' Conference (MARCOM), 2 July 2015.
[360] 'Army Europe, Lithuanian Land Forces sign memo of understanding, outline shared strategic vision', US Army, 6 July 2015, http://www.army.mil/article/151729/.

7. Final Word

Far from being a 'current crisis', the confrontation between Russia and the West over Ukraine is a symptom of the deep-seated and long-term incompatibility of each side's view of the world. It will persist for as long as the West supports the independence and unqualified sovereignty of the front-line states which Russia perceives as its fiefdom. Pretence at all-encompassing strategic partnership with Moscow was only possible while Russia was in a position of relative weakness.

Now that Russia feels itself more capable of taking action to realize its long-term foreign policy ambitions, the outlook is for a return to normal in relations: namely, continued conflict and confrontation. The most recent edition of Russia's National Security Strategy, released at the very end of 2015, bears out the main themes outlined above.[361] It sets a confident and assertive tone, while still seeking to increase Russia's international influence and further challenge US dominance in international affairs. Some threats are considered to have been averted, while others are still to be overcome, for example by making use of Russia's continuing drive to modernize its military.

In this respect, it is the two decades of relative quiescence following the end of the Soviet Union that were the exception to the norm in relations between Russia and Europe. To understand that norm, a much longer view is required. A history of Russia published in 1878 noted that 'Europe may be divided into two unequal parts [...] the Western part is shared between all the monarchies and republics of Europe; the Eastern is united under the Russian sceptre'.[362] Viewed from Moscow, this domination of neighbours is both Russia's natural right and the best means of ensuring its security.

Russia continues to present itself as being under approaching threat, and is mobilizing to address that threat.[363] The ways it does so, even if it views or presents them as defensive measures, are likely to have severe consequences for its neighbours. There is no reason to think the trend of the past 10 years will not continue – the more Russia develops its conventional capability, the more confident and aggressive it will become. Meanwhile, the longer the West waits to make it clear that it will resist Russia, the harder this resistance will be and the lower its chances of success.

An underlying conceptual shift is also important. Recognizing that Western values and vital interests are not reconcilable with those of Russia, and adjusting for that reality in long-term management of the relationship, is crucial. This basic conflict of interest means that the West must either invest heavily and for the long term in deterring Russia in ways that are meaningful to Moscow, or take the alternative and abandon the front-line states together with the defence of Western values. Understanding and accepting this, and adjusting defence and security policy and investment accordingly, is the biggest contribution that can be made at this point to future European peace and stability.

[361] National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, approved 31 December 2015, http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/l8iXkR8XLAtxeilX7JK3XXy6Y0AsHD5v.pdf.
[362] Alfred Rambaud, *Histoire de la Russie* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1878).
[363] As described in detail by speakers at Chatham House seminar 'State Mobilization: Putting Russia on a War Footing?', 27 January 2016.

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Cover image: Vladimir Putin visits the studios of Russia Today's English-language service, accompanied by the channel's editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan. Russia Today, now renamed RT, is one element in a wide range of mutually reinforcing media channels used by the Russian state to influence public opinion abroad.

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