

# A Competitive Strategy to Counter Russian Aggression Against NATO

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## Executive Summary

The world has entered a new era of great power competition. The 2017 *U.S. National Security Strategy* declared

After being dismissed as a phenomenon of an earlier century, great power competition returned. China and Russia began to reassert their influence regionally and globally. . . They are contesting our geopolitical advantages and trying to change the international order in their favor.<sup>1</sup>

Building off the concept of a renewed great power competition, the *U.S. National Defense Strategy* took a broad view of the necessary actions to ensure national security:

A long-term strategic competition requires the seamless integration of multiple elements of national power—diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement and military. More than any other nation, America can expand the competitive space, seizing the initiative to challenge our competitors where we possess advantages and they lack strength.<sup>2</sup>

What the *National Defense Strategy* calls for, in essence, is a Competitive Strategy. This is an approach developed by the Pentagon’s Office of Net Assessment in the late 1970s to construct a long-term strategy for managing the military threat posed by the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup>

The main steps in the Competitive Strategies process are: 1) the identification and evaluation of the enduring strengths and weaknesses of both sides; 2) the alignment of one side’s enduring strengths against the other’s areas of weakness, and; 3) the identification of specific actions that one side can employ to exploit their strengths against the adversary’s weakness.

This study seeks to support the visions articulated in the *National Security Strategy* and *National Defense Strategy* by developing a Competitive Strategy that can be employed to counter Russian aggression against the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It identifies areas of comparative Western strength and Russian weakness.

It also identifies policies, mechanisms and investments that the U.S. and NATO should pursue to position strengths against weaknesses, thereby enabling the West to compete more effectively against Russia.

The current competition between the U.S./NATO and Russia is fundamentally different from that of the Cold War decades. So too is the international environment in which it is taking place and the relative power of the competitors. Hence, the U.S. needs a new approach to confront the Russian threat to NATO.

A new strategy for the long-term competition with Russia must address the relative prominence of hybrid operations in Russia’s strategy while simultaneously responding to the marked improvements in its conventional military forces and the evolution of Moscow’s views regarding escalation to nuclear use. The West faces a multi-faceted threat from an adversary militarily weaker than its Soviet ancestor and more vulnerable to economic pressure, but seemingly much more capable of wielding non-military instruments of state power.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ADA301844>

Russia today suffers from a range of strategic weaknesses or vulnerabilities that can be addressed in a long-term Competitive Strategy. These include:

- Chronic economic stagnation
- An increasingly authoritarian political system
- A small number of weak or dysfunctional allies
- A conventional military with limited capabilities and excessive ambitions
- Difficulties pursuing advanced military technologies

It is important to recognize that NATO's and the U.S' challenge is not from any particular element of Russian power. Rather, it is to defeat Putin's strategy to disrupt the current international security system by denying Moscow the ability to disrupt this order at minimum risk and an acceptable price.

It is a mistake to view the current struggle between Russia and the Western allies primarily as a military competition. Certainly, attention must be paid to NATO's ability to deter Moscow. But if Russia is denied the possibility of a quick, low-cost military campaign, then the competition will be decided on other battlefields. It is in these other domains that the U.S. and its allies have the advantage and are likely to prevail.

The primary competition should be in areas of Western strength and Russian weakness: economics, information operations, rule of law, the global banking system and advanced technology, such as commercial information technology (IT). The U.S. and its allies need to coordinate strategies to deny Russian access to investment resources and commercial technologies for its oil and gas industry.

The U.S. and NATO must compete with Russia in the conventional and nuclear military spheres. It must be made clear to Russia that it will never have a route to a quick and easy conventional victory against NATO, nor a credible option to escalate to the use of nuclear weapons without the certainty of retaliation. NATO needs a well-funded program to counter Russian investments in anti-access/area denial capabilities, particularly its integrated air defense. NATO needs to exploit its advantage in naval forces.

Air and missile defenses are a necessary component of a NATO Competitive Strategy. Russian leadership continues to be concerned with the potential for defenses to complicate its ability to execute high intensity disarming strikes against NATO. The U.S. and its allies need to exploit these concerns by deploying additional air and missile defenses.

Electronic warfare (EW) and cyber need to be priority areas for investment in a Competitive Strategy to counter Russia. EW assets should be directed at negating Russian air defense sensors, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets and communications, command and control systems.

The U.S. and NATO need an information operations strategy that not only defends networks and institutions from attack but also conducts offensive actions against Russia. The Russian leadership is vulnerable to an information operations campaign designed to split them from the people.

Finally, the U.S and its allies must be willing to engage in a long-term competitive campaign to its technological advantage vis-à-vis Russia. Investments need to be made in areas such as robotics, artificial intelligence and autonomy, hypersonics, directed energy, electronic warfare and cyber.

NATO needs to focus not just on science and technology, but also on related industrial capabilities that will support high quantity production of advanced weapons systems. It is in the latter area that the West has a distinct advantage over Russia.

## Competitive Strategies Then and Now

Competitive Strategies (CS) was an approach to address the military threats posed by the Soviet Union, developed by the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment in the late 1970s. CS analyses and war gaming helped the Navy develop the Maritime Strategy, the Reagan Administration pursue the Strategic Defense Initiative and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) put in place a strategy for dealing with the Soviet military's investment in high-tempo offensive operations in Europe.

The Competitive Strategies methodology employs systematic, long-range strategic planning in order to create political-military strategies that effectively deter Russian aggression and prevent escalation of the current competition into actual hostilities. The key aspects of a CS approach are:

1) the identification and evaluation of the enduring strengths and weaknesses of both sides; 2) the alignment of one side's enduring strengths against the other's areas of weakness; 3) the identification of specific U.S./NATO actions that exploit their strengths against Russian weakness; 4) the iteration of U.S./NATO actions and Russian reactions through multiple "competitive steps;" 5) the identification of additional actions and investments that the U.S./NATO should take in order to strengthen their competitive position vis-à-vis Russia; and 6) the aggregation and refinement of lessons learned through the CS process into a long-term strategy for countering the various Russian threats to NATO.

There have been a number of efforts to apply the Competitive Strategies methodology to the development of post-Cold War U.S. national security strategies. In 2000, the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center conducted a study of ways to apply the CS approach to limit the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The Naval War College sponsored a conference of leading defense and foreign policy scholars in 2011 to develop a Competitive Strategies-based approach to the U.S.-China competition. Recently, the Center for Global Security Research at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory examined the potential for the broader application of CS to U.S. policymaking in a complex era. This study concluded that CS could significantly enhance the development and conduct of U.S. foreign and national security strategies.<sup>4</sup>

When the Competitive Strategies methodology was last employed some 35 years ago, the essential problem to address was the Soviet Union's attainment of nuclear parity with the West and its efforts to achieve a dominant conventional offensive capability on the Eurasian landmass, with a particular focus on the European theater and NATO as the principal adversary. While there were certainly political and informational aspects to this conflict, it was primarily a military and, to a somewhat lesser extent, an economic competition.

Since the end of the Cold War, many of the determinative features of the East-West competition and the balance of power between the U.S./NATO and the Soviet Union/Warsaw Pact have

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Sokolski, ed., *Prevailing in a Well-Armed World: Devising Competitive Strategies Against Weapons Proliferation*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, March 2000; Thomas Mahnken, ed., *Competitive Strategies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, CA, 2012; Jason Ellis, *Seizing the Initiative: Competitive Strategies and the Making of Modern U.S. Defense Policy*, TR--680128, The Center for Global Security Research, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, January 2016.

changed. Some of these changes, such as the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union and the withdrawal of the Red Army from Eastern Europe, enhanced Western security. Others, such as the withdrawal of most U.S. military forces from the Continent, the erosion of the military-technical overmatch on which much of NATO's deterrent strategy relied and additional political fracture lines in an enlarged Alliance, are more problematic.

NATO's expansion eastward created new military vulnerabilities, particularly in the Baltic region, by providing membership to countries with antiquated, Soviet-era militaries and nascent democratic institutions. Along the new NATO-Russian border, in the Caucasus and Central Asia, are a number of former Soviet republics that are in a position of quasi-independence from Moscow. They are also sources of political and military instability.

The means and methods by which nations engage in conflict also appear to have changed, or at least expanded. Terms such as "hybrid warfare" and "grey area conflict" are used to describe the simultaneous employment of a tailored mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behavior, as well as more traditional intelligence and information operations across a battlespace that encompasses states' political, economic, cultural, social and information spaces.

The current competition between the U.S./NATO and Russia is fundamentally different from that of the Cold War decades. So too is the international environment in which it is taking place and the relative power of the competitors. Hence, the U.S. needs a new approach to confront the Russian threat to NATO.

The response must address the relative prominence of hybrid operations in Russia's strategy while simultaneously responding to the marked improvements in its conventional military forces and the evolution of Moscow's views regarding escalation to nuclear use. The West faces a multi-faceted threat from an adversary militarily weaker than its Soviet ancestor, but seemingly much more capable of wielding non-military instruments of state power.

The Russian campaign against Crimea and Ukraine demonstrated Moscow's skill at employing a range of means and methods including "little green men," cyber and intelligence operations against government institutions and critical infrastructure, exploitation of media outlets and social communications and the rapid deployment of specially designed and trained military formations. The concern is that these same tactics and techniques are being employed against NATO countries, including interference in their elections.

The military balance between Russia and the U.S./NATO has also changed significantly, particularly over the past decade. Moscow's efforts at military reform have demonstrated considerable success, improving both the organization of the Russian military and the deployment of an array of military capabilities that, as senior Pentagon officials have repeatedly warned, undermine traditional areas of U.S. military advantage.

NATO's military capabilities have declined dramatically over the past two-plus decades. Most members have consistently failed to meet the Alliance's goal of spending two percent of gross domestic product on defense. As a result, they have reduced their deployable military forces drastically. For a while, the U.S. Army struggled to redeploy a single armored brigade back to the Continent. There are serious doubts regarding the ability of U.S./NATO air forces and navies to penetrate Russia's expanding anti-access/area denial shield.

Unlike the Cold War, when the focus of the West's deterrence strategy was on Soviet military aggression, today NATO must focus on deterring the Kremlin's efforts to change the European political system, undermine the Alliance, neutralize the U.S. as a counterweight to Russian regional power and create a domain or "safe space" for Russia.

Moscow's conventional and nuclear forces have a central but not necessarily decisive role to play in its current strategy to defeat the West. Therefore, creating offsetting or even superior military capabilities to those disposed by Moscow may not be sufficient to contain the Kremlin's measures to undermine the political stability and economic cohesion of Europe.

Western strategists must recognize that, from Moscow's perspective, Russia has been in a state of war for more than a decade. As then-Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov told an official military conference in 2005:

Let us face it, there is a war against Russia under way, and it has been going on for quite a few years. No one declared war on us. There is not one country that would be in a state of war with Russia. But there are people and organizations in various countries, who take part in hostilities against the Russian Federation.<sup>5</sup>

Washington's view of the dynamics of the West's relationship with Russia is less dire than that suggested by Ivanov. Nevertheless, there is a clear recognition that the U.S. is now engaged in a strategic competition with Russia every bit as broad and dangerous as that which existed during the Cold War and which is, in some ways, much more complex.

The new U.S. *National Security Strategy* observes that:

After being dismissed as a phenomenon of an earlier century, great power competition returned. China and Russia began to reassert their influence regionally and globally. Today, they are fielding military capabilities designed to deny America access in times of crisis and to contest our ability to operate freely in critical commercial zones during peacetime. In short, they are contesting our geopolitical advantages and trying to change the international order in their favor.<sup>6</sup>

The *National Security Strategy* explicitly recognizes the new features of great power competition in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

Deterrence today is significantly more complex to achieve than during the Cold War. Adversaries studied the American way of war and began investing in capabilities that targeted our strengths and sought to exploit perceived weaknesses. The spread of accurate and inexpensive weapons and the use of cyber tools have allowed state and non-state competitors to harm the United States across various domains. Such capabilities contest what was until recently U.S. dominance across the land, air, maritime, space, and cyberspace domains. They also enable adversaries to attempt strategic attacks against the United States—without resorting to nuclear weapons—in ways that could cripple our economy and our ability to deploy our military forces.

The Cold War was a political-ideological competition conducted largely in the arena of military affairs. Today, the nature of the competition remains political but the means have evolved.

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. Stephen Blank, Unpublished Manuscript, 2017

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

Russia has weaponized the instruments of interstate relations, the so-called tools of soft power. Moscow has not only nationalized but militarized Russia's economy, both as a means to enhance its capacity for war but also in order to employ economic means to achieve strategic ends. It has turned international law into a field of combat. Moscow has enlisted criminal organizations and rogue internet hackers to operate alongside government officials and military forces. Western strategists refer to the new Russian strategy as "hybrid warfare."

The focus of U.S. defense planning for the past several years has been on the growing military threat posed by competitors such as Russia, China, Iran and North Korea. There was an unstated but barely disguised assumption that restoration of the balance in military capabilities would in some fashion reestablish political stability, maintain the current international system and deter major wars.

The so-called Third Offset Strategy advocated by the Obama Administration was intended to reestablish U.S. military-technological superiority through investment in new areas such as undersea systems, hypersonics, electronic warfare, big data analytics, advanced materials, 3D printing, energy and propulsion, robotics, autonomy, man-machine interfaces and advanced sensing and computing.<sup>7</sup>

Building off the concept of great power competition articulated in the *National Security Strategy*, the *National Defense Strategy* takes a broad view of the necessary actions to ensure U.S. national security. In particular, the document proposes expanding the competitive space in ways that position areas of U.S. comparative advantage against those where our adversaries are relatively weak:

A long-term strategic competition requires the seamless integration of multiple elements of national power—diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, and military. More than any other nation, America can expand the competitive space, seizing the initiative to challenge our competitors where we possess advantages and they lack strength. A more lethal force, strong alliances and partnerships, American technological innovation, and a culture of performance will generate decisive and sustained U.S. military advantages.<sup>8</sup>

This study seeks to support the visions articulated in the *National Security Strategy* and *National Defense Strategy* by developing a Competitive Strategy that can be employed to counter Russian aggression against NATO. It identifies areas of comparative Western competitive strength and Russian weakness and identifies policies, mechanisms and investments that the U.S. and NATO should pursue to position strengths against weaknesses, thereby enabling the West to compete more effectively against Russia.

## The Russian Threat to NATO and Europe

What does President Vladimir Putin want? This question has bedeviled Western government officials, intelligence officers and academics for almost twenty years. Previous American administrations constructed their policies towards Russia and relations with Putin based on the assumption that fundamentally, they were dealing with a normal state and leader. Washington's

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<sup>7</sup> Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work, "The Third U.S. Offset Strategy and its Implications for Partners and Allies," speech, Washington, D.C., January 26, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

Russian policy was driven largely by the belief that Moscow was motivated by the same set of interests and concerns as most other nations: security and prosperity at home, a recognized place in the global order and freedom to conduct its domestic politics as its government saw fit.

There was some slight recognition that the Russian experience since the end of the Cold War colored the Kremlin's views of Western intentions, the value of the existing international order and the applicability of liberal notions of domestic governance to the Russian condition. Also, there was some reluctance to totally embrace Vladimir Putin given his KGB background and how he rose to power. Overall, however, it was an article of faith in virtually every Western capital that Russia was a country with whom common interests could be found and that Putin was a leader driven by the usual and conventional set of motives.

What the West never recognized, what its leaders really could not fathom, was the fact that Russian foreign and security policies were driven by an overwhelming sense of inferiority and grievance. All that the West could offer Moscow -- economic development, access to technology, membership in the G-8, arms control agreements or a special status with respect to the NATO Alliance -- were insufficient to reassure Russia that it was both safe and an equal. It turns out that the Kremlin could only feel secure if its military position was unassailable and the West was vulnerable at the same time. Security for Moscow was and remains a zero-sum calculation.

None of our diplomats and intelligence officers were able to see that Putin was a man driven by overweening ambition and personal malice. His desire to be the leader of a great power, whose views and interests had to be considered by the global community and a military power to be feared took precedence over concerns for the economic well-being or political rights of his own people. Consider the magnitude of the nationalistic grandiosity behind his statement, made in 2005, that "the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the twentieth century."<sup>9</sup>

The degree to which personal animus may influence Putin's behavior is hard to estimate but cannot be dismissed. It has been widely reported that the Intelligence Community believes that Putin not only approved the hacking of the U.S. political system during the 2016 Presidential campaign, but personally directed the operation.<sup>10</sup>

Why would he take such a prominent role in something as mundane as hacking the Democratic National Committee (DNC) or John Podesta's computers? Particularly when he thought that Hillary Clinton would win the election and the effects of this operation appear to have been so marginal. Of all world leaders, he perhaps knows best what it really takes to swing an election. Hacking the DNC wasn't going to do it.

The simple answer may be personal animus towards Hillary Clinton. Many observers believe that then-Secretary of State Clinton's remarks, that the 2011 Russian parliamentary elections were rigged, outraged the Russian president. So, when Putin saw an opportunity for revenge, he took it. As former U.S. Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul observed, "He was upset [with

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/1488723/Soviet-break-up-was-geopolitical-disaster-says-Putin.html>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/06/23/putin-denied-meddling-in-the-u-s-election-the-cia-caught-him-doing-just-that/?utm\\_term=.f9b558cc5552](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/06/23/putin-denied-meddling-in-the-u-s-election-the-cia-caught-him-doing-just-that/?utm_term=.f9b558cc5552)

Clinton] and continued to be for the rest of the time that I was in government. One could speculate that this is his moment for payback.”<sup>11</sup>

It is understandable why a leader driven by a myopic vision to restore his country’s erstwhile glory and consumed with a sense of personal pique would attempt to build an edifice of resurgent Russian greatness on a base of sand. By most measures of national power, Russia is an extraordinarily weak nation. Its economy is reliant on extractive industries, primarily gas and oil, and on arms exports. Its dependence on foreign technology grows almost daily. Its demographic situation is nothing short of a catastrophe.

Even the Russian military is not what a great power requires. Russia is a military power primarily because of its large arsenal of nuclear weapons. So central are these weapons to Moscow’s foreign and defense policies that it is even willing to deploy a new long-range, land-based cruise missile in violation of the long-standing Intermediate-Range Nuclear Weapons Treaty in order to bolster Russian theater nuclear force capabilities.

While Russian conventional forces have been modernized over the past decade, they are a one trick pony, capable only of limited offensive operations in areas immediately beyond its borders. Russian anti-access/area denial forces are relatively brittle and intended largely to shield the homeland from the power of U.S. and Alliance air and sea forces. The Kremlin’s efforts to organize a national mobilization capability, which would be required in the event of a conflict with NATO, have been largely unsuccessful. Thus, the Russian military is really designed to support a “smash-and-grab” strategy similar to what we saw in Crimea.

Fundamentally, what constrains Vladimir Putin’s aggressive impulses is a unified Alliance and Western military power. Therefore, it is vital that the U.S. and its allies continue to bolster their conventional and nuclear forces. The deployment of advanced theater missile defenses on land and at sea, the return of U.S. armored forces to Europe and investments in advanced air capabilities, such as the F-35 and a new bomber, will all serve to deter Russian adventurism. The U.S. and its NATO allies are also beginning to take Moscow’s cyber capabilities seriously and develop appropriate defensive and offensive responses. The modernization of U.S. strategic and theater nuclear forces is progressing but should be accelerated. Peace with Russia can only be maintained through strength.

## **Russian Non-Military Capabilities for Distraction and Disruption**

As Putin and other Russian leaders have made clear, the war they saw was one using primarily non-military means and intended to destabilize the Russian government and political system. The threat they fear is one of political destabilization at home. In effect, the principal threat to Russian security is an insurgency, but one that exists not simply within Russia but outside it as well.

The Kremlin believes that the West has been engaged in an ongoing war against Russia, employing a full range of means, particularly information operations. Consequently, the Kremlin

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/07/clinton-putin-226153>

sees itself as having to fight a sophisticated international counterinsurgency campaign against the West, in general, and NATO and the United States, in particular.<sup>12</sup>

President Putin's decision is influenced by Russia's experiences since the end of the Cold War – internal coup attempts, terrorist attacks, 'colored revolutions' around Russia, wars inside and outside of Russia, unfinished reforms, and perceptions of Russia's natural vulnerability to a fate similar to that of the Soviet Union given its one-dimensional economic base and political superstructure. However, Putin's policy is driven mostly by concerns about Russia's inability to compete on almost any level and in almost any sphere with the world's greatest powers absent fundamental changes to the security, energy, economic, and financial systems around Russia.<sup>13</sup>

Russia has made use of the limited means at its disposal both to deter the West and to further its efforts to undermine external threats. Western observers tend to focus on the non-military and paramilitary means employed by Moscow, labeling them as examples of "hybrid warfare" or of "grey zone" conflict capabilities. As Russian experts are quick to point out, these terms have no equivalents in Russian strategic theory. These means are being employed as a part of a seamless, coordinated conflict strategy that sees no true distinction between war and peace.

Therefore it would be more accurate to say that we are facing a comprehensive challenge that simultaneously and constantly comprises conflicts that need not have any discernible starting point or phases as in U.S. literature. To use the U.S. military terminology, it is always phase zero and there is no discernible gap between war and peace. Or, as Lenin might have said, and certainly believed, politics is the continuation of war by other means. Ceasefires, actual conventional warfare, and incessant information warfare – defined as attempts to alter mass political consciousness in targeted countries – occur together or separately as needed and are in constant flux. Regular forces can be used conventionally or as proxies, irregular, or even covert forces allegedly for "peacekeeping" or other operations. The actual use of military force depends on the effectiveness with which non-military instruments of power, organized crime, ethnic or other irregular paramilitary groups, espionage, political subversion and penetration of institutions in the targeted country, economic warfare, information warfare, and special operations forces. Outright victory need not be the intended or victorious outcome. It may be enough to secure constant leverage and influence on the military-strategic, political and social situation in a state of no war no peace.<sup>14</sup>

Oceans of ink and terabytes of electronic musings have been expended on the subject of hybrid warfare. The classic formulation is a non-state actor with appurtenances of state power and, in many cases, support from traditional nation states. Of particular concern to defense planners and intelligence experts is the ability of these non-state actors to acquire and employ advanced

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen J. Blank, "'No Need to Threaten Us, We are Frightened of Ourselves,' Russia's Blueprint for a Police State, The New Security Strategy," in Stephen J. Blank and Richard Weitz, eds, *The Russian Military Today and Tomorrow: Essays in Memory of Mary Fitzgerald*, Strategic Studies Institute, The U.S. Army War College, July 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen R. Covington, *Putin's Choices for Russia*, Report, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, August 2015., p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Stephen Blank, Unpublished Manuscript, 2017

military systems, such as anti-tank guided missiles, artillery rockets and man-portable anti-aircraft missiles.

Insurgents and terrorists could employ advanced systems to increase their lethal capabilities without changing their strategies or organizations. The concept of hybrid warfare was soon expanded to the realm of strategy. As explained by perhaps the best scholar on the subject:

The most distinctive change in the character of modern war is the blurred or blended nature of combat. We do not face a widening number of distinct challenges but their *convergence* into hybrid wars.

These hybrid wars blend the lethality of state conflict with the fanatical and protracted fervor of irregular warfare. In such conflicts, future adversaries (states, state-sponsored groups, or self-funded actors) will exploit access to modern military capabilities...<sup>15</sup>

Prior to 2014, hybrid warfare was generally believed to be a strategy of the weak – groups or nations lacking the military means, financial resources, territorial base or organizational skills to fully exploit modern military means. The Russian invasion of Crimea and the initiation of a proxy war in Eastern Ukraine stunned Western strategists and the community of hybrid warfare theorists, in particular.

Here was a major power relying largely on a mix of special forces, proxy forces, limited numbers of traditional military units (often in disguise) and a sophisticated campaign of political subversion, economic attack, cyber warfare and information operations to conduct a campaign of territorial conquest while reducing the risk of escalation to conventional interstate conflict.

This led some observers to propose the idea of multi-vector hybrid warfare and of political and information operations intended to undermine target states either to support more kinetic operations or even to obviate the need for physical coercion as somehow a new concept in interstate conflict. Others drew a close correlation between actions by the current Russian government and the history of Soviet political and propaganda operations during the Cold War.

More recently, a number of authors have brought a measure of historical perspective and dispassionate analysis to the issue. While the means available to Russia are somewhat different, notably access to the world's banking system, the presence of Moscow-supported news outlets in Western capitals and the ability to conduct cyberattacks on critical networks, the use of all national sources of power to influence the behavior of adversaries and prepare the battlespace for possible kinetic conflict is as old as the organized state.<sup>16</sup>

While it is true that many states have practiced some form of hybrid warfare, not all have done so successfully and few have been able to implement it as an integrated strategy. We have seen examples of this recently when repeated attempts by the White House to forge an alliance with moderate Syrian rebels against either Assad or ISIS foundered over concerns for the rebel groups' political bona fides. Government efforts to develop information operations against

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<sup>15</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, No. 1, 2009, p. 37

<sup>16</sup> Williamson Murray and Peter Mansoor, eds. *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012; Frank Hoffman, "On Not So New Warfare: Political Warfare vs Hybrid Threats," *War on the Rocks*, July 28, 2014; Michael Kofman, "Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Arts," *War on the Rocks*, March 11, 2016.

Islamic violent extremists have stalled over concerns about not being allowed to engage in propaganda, e.g., to lie.

In reality, only a few nations and non-state actors have demonstrated a real proficiency for hybrid warfare. What distinguishes the masters of the art from the average practitioners of hybrid warfare is that they learned these skills in their struggles for domestic power. The tools for hybrid warfare – deception, infiltration, corruption, the use of cover organizations, paramilitary forces, the creation of new domestic security entities and conventional military capabilities – were all used first to seize and consolidate domestic power. Russia employs all these measures and more.

It is important to recognize that hybrid warfare can itself be conducted in the service of a strategy for information warfare. Even the limited use of force, particularly if conducted by units whose identity can be blurred, can support an information campaign.<sup>17</sup> The use of so-called “little green men” – Russian Special Forces wearing Ukrainian uniforms to seize critical targets in Crimea – is an example. So too is the recent deployment of military contractors to support Syrian Army units operating against a U.S. Special Force’s base in that country.

The range of tools that fall under the hybrid/information warfare umbrella is truly impressive:

Power pressure, which includes: the use of superior force, demonstrations of force, psychological attacks, ultimatums, threats of sanctions, intentional portrayal of the government as risky, combat reconnaissance, provocative maneuvers, weapons tests, denying enemy access to or isolating certain areas, increasing the alert status of forces, forming coalitions, officially declaring war, support for internal forces that destabilize the enemy’s situation outside of the battlefield, limited strikes to put some forces out of action, exploiting and playing up victory, demonstrating a capacity for ruthlessness, and showing mercy toward an enemy ally that surrenders.<sup>18</sup>

Russia has also sought to use many of the processes, traditions and norms of the current international system not only in the pursuit of its national interests but in order to undermine that global order. An example of this is Moscow’s efforts to exploit the evolving international legal regime through what has become known as “lawfare.” This is defined as “the strategy of using – or misusing – law as a substitute for traditional military means to achieve an operational objective.”<sup>19</sup> Russia has exploited a Western tendency to allow Moscow to claim innocence unless proven guilty, and sometimes even then. In addition, the Kremlin has sought to entangle its opponents in the courts as a means of staving off harsher responses.

Lawfare can have a tangible impact on democratic states when their adversaries use it in an exploitative way. Lawfare can be used in the context of hybrid war. Examples of hybrid warfare as witnessed in the Russian/Ukrainian conflict of 2014/2015 and the ongoing conflict with *Daesh* [ISIS] are particularly sensitive to lawfare due to an apparent asymmetric adherence to the international rule of law among involved actors. The different legal and ethical approaches of democratic states in warfare and their non-

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/putins-information-warfare-ukraine-soviet-origins-russias-hybrid-warfare>

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.rit.edu/~w-cmmc/literature/Thomas\\_2004.pdf](https://www.rit.edu/~w-cmmc/literature/Thomas_2004.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> [http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/faculty\\_scholarship/3347](http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/faculty_scholarship/3347)

democratic opponents in hybrid war scenarios has the potential to impact negatively on the eventual prompt success of Western military actions.<sup>20</sup>

Today, Russia is the ultimate hybrid threat. This is the case not merely because it has developed a panoply of official and unofficial tools with which to pursue its strategic objective but because it is the quintessential hybrid actor. Hybrid actors are generally defined as non-state entities able to employ both traditional and non-traditional elements of power and, in many cases, support from traditional nation states.

Russia is unique insofar as it is controlled by a cabal that has many of the characteristics of non-state groups that have acquired hybrid capabilities and developed strategies based on their use. According to one long-time senior NATO official:

The Russian military has adopted an approach to conflict in peace, crisis, and war that couples large-scale conventional and nuclear forces to the application of non-attributable, ambiguous means of destabilization.

This Russian model of hybrid warfare differs fundamentally from other models in this latter respect. No other nation in Europe is implementing such an array of actions that break with post-Cold War European norms and practices.<sup>21</sup>

It is hardly surprising that the Kremlin, with its core of former and current secret police officers and close engagement with criminal elements in the pursuit of pecuniary interests, has been able to effectively employ bribery, blackmail, hacking, intimidation and outright murder in its domestic and foreign operations. Domestically, these tools have been used to crush Russia's nascent democracy, restrict the development of a civic culture and exact extraordinary rents from the economy.

Internationally, these same means are being employed to destabilize the current international order and, most significantly, the set of alliances and bilateral relationships that are essential to peace in Europe. As Mark Galeotti and Anna Arutunyan observed, "Russia as a state lends itself to all kinds of notions of hybridity: hybrid war, hybrid democracy, hybrid autocracy."<sup>22</sup>

What makes Russia the most dangerous hybrid threat is that the use of these non-traditional means is integrated with and supported by traditional conventional military capabilities and both are covered by a nuclear umbrella. Moreover, as demonstrated by the operations to seize Crimea and destabilize Eastern Ukraine as well as numerous recent exercises, the Russian military is increasingly capable of and, one might argue, specifically designed to support the employment of non-traditional/hybrid means and methods and the political and territorial gains achieved through their use.

Russia's breakout strategy is supported by many other actions that break with, and break out, of the European security system. Russia's breakout actions include the use of force in Crimea, withdrawal from the CFE [Conventional Armed Forces in Europe] treaty, military, financial, and political support to separatists in Eastern Ukraine, direct financial, political, and military actions to destabilize Ukraine on a broader scale, a military

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<sup>20</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312072465\\_Lawfare\\_in\\_Hybrid\\_Wars\\_The\\_21st\\_Century\\_Warfare](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312072465_Lawfare_in_Hybrid_Wars_The_21st_Century_Warfare)

<sup>21</sup> Stephen R. Covington, *Putin's Choices for Russia*, Report, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, August 2015

<sup>22</sup> <http://russialist.org/hybrid-business-the-risks-in-the-kremlins-weaponization-of-the-economy-russia/>

rearmament program, the buildup of military capabilities in the Arctic, Black Sea, and Baltic Sea, sudden large-scale military exercises that shift forces to higher combat readiness involving long-range deployments, nuclear force exercises designed to posture and intimidate, and energy, financial, and informational pressure on European countries. All of these political and military actions break with the norms, rules, and practices of the post-Cold War period and destabilize the current security system.<sup>23</sup>

## Russian Military Capabilities

As conflicts in Crimea, Eastern Ukraine and Syria have unfolded, the world has had a chance to see the new Russian military strategy and many elements of its force posture in action. Putin has successfully finessed his country's myriad of weaknesses – economic, political, demographic and military – in ways that permit him to use coercion and even naked military force against his neighbors with near impunity. Dealing with an aggressive, yet relatively weak Russia poses a far different problem for the West than deterring or containing a rising China.

Moreover, the kind of military Russia is developing may be particularly well suited to the Kremlin's objective of undermining the existing international security order and gaining recognition of Russia's great power status with a limited risk of war. The "new" Russian military has demonstrated a particular mix of capabilities – rapid, but geographically limited offensive operations, electronic and cyber warfare, long-range precision strikes, powerful anti-access/area denial systems and advanced theater and strategic nuclear weapons. These well serve the goals of supporting grey area operations, conducting all-arms conventional operations in regions adjacent to Russia's borders and deterring Western conventional responses or escalatory moves.

The discussions of Russian hybrid warfare should not obscure an understanding of the extent to which that country has modernized its conventional and nuclear forces and to which it is relying not only on grey zone techniques but conventional military forces as the centerpiece of its local aggressions. It is also important to recognize how much Russian ventures in Eastern Europe have rapidly morphed from hybrid operations employing non-traditional means and methods to classic conventional military operations. The recent intervention in Syria was a model power projection operation, suggesting that the Russian military is quite capable of limited high intensity conventional operations.

Indeed, the hybrid label serves to draw a veil over the conventional aspects of the war in Eastern Ukraine. While non-military means of power were deployed, they relied on more traditional conventional measures for their success. This was amply demonstrated in the battles at Debaltsevo, Donbass airport and Ilovaisk, during which much of the fighting involved high intensity combat, including the extensive use of armor, artillery and multiple launch rocket systems, as well as drones and electronic warfare. During these battles, massed bombardments were deployed to considerable lethal effect – in short but intense bombardments battalion-sized units were rendered inoperable, suffering heavy casualties.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Blank, "A Clinic on Clausewitz: Lessons of Russia's Syrian Campaign," p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Monaghan, "The 'War' in Russia's 'Hybrid Warfare,'" *Parameters*, Volume 45, Number 4, Winter 2015-16, p. 72.

The most significant aspects of the Russian military's modernization effort have to do not with new and more capable weapons systems but with structural reforms, most notably the reduction in the overall size of the military and the number of units, the increased focus on professionalizing all levels of service and the creation of a relatively small set of well-trained, manned and equipped land, sea and air forces. The result of these efforts, albeit not yet completed, has been to provide the Kremlin with a force designed for rapid, high intensity conventional operations within a geographically limited zone that corresponds largely to the boundaries of the former Soviet Union/Warsaw Pact.

The new Russian theater force structure has four essential components. First, a limited number of highly capable, rapidly deployable and mobile formations, a combination of Special Forces (Spetsnaz), airborne and light infantry brigades, manned disproportionately by professional soldiers. These provide both an offensive element and a rapid response defensive capability.

Second, a conventional Army consisting of an increasingly standardized set of armored, motorized infantry and artillery/missile brigades that are slowly being equipped with modernized tanks, armored fighting vehicles, artillery and missile systems. Increasingly the artillery and rocket forces are the key offensive force element, being organized and equipped to execute a paralyzing first strike on opposing theater forces.

Third, an expanding, increasingly sophisticated air defense capability resident in both the Army and Air Force. This capability is not only designed for the defense of Russian territory but also to deny access to critical airspace over foreign countries, particularly NATO's eastern members.

Finally, a supporting air force and naval strike capability, elements of which were clearly demonstrated during the Syrian intervention. New command and control structures and support capabilities (e.g., logistics; ISR; medical) are being put in place to enable these forces to operate more jointly, rapidly and at greater distances from the Russian border.<sup>25</sup>

It must also be recognized that Russia may have reconstituted its chemical warfare capabilities with the intent of using such weapons in lieu of nuclear escalation. The Skripal case shows that Russia is willing to use chemical agents in situations short of overt hostilities.<sup>26</sup> Even more ominous, there is credible research that suggests Russia maintains a capability to develop, store and deliver biological warfare agents to this day.<sup>27</sup>

The strategic implications of these capabilities for Moscow were described by General Phillip Breedlove, a former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, thus:

They are absolutely able to bring great force to a position of readiness. That is something that we have to think about: What does that mean geo-strategically that we now have a

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<sup>25</sup> Keir Giles, *Russia's New Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power*, Research Paper, Chatham House, March 2016; Tomasz Smura and Rafał Lipka *The Modernization Program of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation – Current Status and Prospects of Success*, Casimir Pulaski Foundation, January 1, 2015; Keir Giles and Dr. Andrew Monaghan, *Russian Military Transformation - Goal In Sight?* Strategic Studies Institute, May 2014.

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/poisoning-of-russian-ex-spy-puts-spotlight-on-moscows-secret-military-labs/2018/03/18/9968efb6-2962-11e8-b79d-f3d931db7f68\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.f5cda10f8242](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/poisoning-of-russian-ex-spy-puts-spotlight-on-moscows-secret-military-labs/2018/03/18/9968efb6-2962-11e8-b79d-f3d931db7f68_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.f5cda10f8242)

<sup>27</sup> Raymond A. Zilinskas & Philippe Mauger, *Biosecurity in Putin's Russia*, Lynne Rienner: 2018

nation that can produce this ready force and now has demonstrated that it will use that ready force to go across a sovereign boundary?<sup>28</sup>

Russian conventional forces are capable of conducting a rapid, high intensity campaign against the states on its immediate Western periphery. Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia – all NATO members – are particularly vulnerable to a conventional *coup de main* or surprise attack. The RAND Corporation has intensively analyzed the military balance in the Baltic region. The conclusions of this effort are, to say the least, sobering:

As currently postured, NATO cannot successfully defend the territory of its most exposed members. Across multiple games using a wide range of expert participants in and out of uniform playing both sides, the longest it has taken Russian forces to reach the outskirts of the Estonian and/or Latvian capitals of Tallinn and Riga, respectively, is 60 hours. Such a rapid defeat would leave NATO with a limited number of options, all bad: a bloody counteroffensive, fraught with escalatory risk, to liberate the Baltics; to escalate itself, as it threatened to do to avert defeat during the Cold War; or to concede at least temporary defeat, with uncertain but predictably disastrous consequences for the Alliance and, not incidentally, the people of the Baltics.<sup>29</sup>

The eminent expert on Russian political and military issues, Dr. Stephen Blank, points out that current Russian operational thinking has long-standing antecedents. In classic Soviet fashion, the modern Russian general staff has been planning for the kinds of operations observed in recent years, organizing the necessary forces and defining the kinds of technical capabilities needed to implement the desired strategy.

The war against Ukraine is not a "new" strategy for Moscow; the Russian general staff has been preparing for Ukraine-type combat operations since 1999. Indeed, the Ukrainian operation has been planned by Moscow at least since 2005...

The Russian military's Zapad 2013 exercise (the word 'Zapad' meaning 'West' in Russian to denote that it was an operation designed to practice operations against NATO) was a dress rehearsal for parts of the Ukraine campaign and future potential operations against the Baltic states.<sup>30</sup>

Moscow is also engaged in a program to create a ring of bases designed to counter what the Kremlin asserts is a Western policy of encircling Russia. New air and ground force bases have been established in western Russia and Belarus. Putin's regime is establishing a string of facilities in the Arctic and in space that are both considered international terrain.

Russian sources have floated the idea of a return of military forces to Cuba and Vietnam. Most recently, Russia announced that it was expanding its bases in Syria into permanent naval and air

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Gordon, "NATO Commander Says He Sees Potent Threat from Russia," *New York Times*, April 2, 2014

<sup>29</sup> [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1200/RR1253/RAND\\_RR1253.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1200/RR1253/RAND_RR1253.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Blank, "A Military Assessment of the Russian War in Ukraine," Testimony Presented to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation, March 4, 2015. Also, Stephen Blank, "Russia's Hybrid War: Through a Glass Darkly," *Kiev Post*, April 14, 2016

facilities. These activities not only provide an outer defense ring for the homeland but create the basis to threaten horizontal escalation in the event of a confrontation with the U.S. or NATO.<sup>31</sup>

Moscow has also trained certain elements of its conventional force structure to support unconventional or hybrid operations. But in many ways, what has been seen over the past few years suggests an arc of development in the future that in many ways reflects the Soviet-era roots of the current Russian government and military.

A recent NATO analysis explains the continuities between Putin's current approach and Soviet-era political and military warfare concepts concludes this way:

In sum, it could be argued that Moscow's non-linear warfare understanding reflects a "new" or "renewed" Russian military thought, not a strategy or concept. It is renewed thinking as it combines the Soviet-legacy Deep Operations Theory and Reflexive Control Theory in order to create a "disguised blitzkrieg impact." In doing so, Moscow uses a core group of elite troops along with a wide array of non-military means while concealing its true geopolitical intentions and surreptitiously influencing its competitors' decision-making algorithms.<sup>32</sup>

The character of the Russian way of war with its emphasis on the employment of all instruments of state power to prepare the battlefield and reliance on rapid but short-duration high intensity conventional operations backstopped by the threat of escalation are a reflection of Russia's fundamental weakness vis-à-vis the U.S. and NATO. According to a leading scholar on the Russian military:

Given the disparity in overall military and economic power, full-scale, prolonged, and conventional conflict with NATO would be likely to entail unsustainable losses for Russia. Any options for use of the military to challenge the West must therefore count on a swift resolution, exploiting Russia's local superiority before the full but distant potential of the West is brought to bear.

Russia's intervention in Syria has confirmed for Moscow that limited but decisive military action is effective in resolving intractable political confrontations and can cause the West to back down in the face of *faits accomplis*. This is a dangerous lesson: Putin may not necessarily have developed a taste for conflict, but it is entirely likely that he has developed a taste for success, with or without the actual deployment of troops. The potential for surprise, plus willingness and capability to take swift action, continues to act as a force multiplier and would assist Russia in seeking a swift result, supported by all levers of military and/or other state power.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-tartus-idUSKCN12A0W6?il=0>

<sup>32</sup> Cam Kasopoglu, Russia's Renewed Military Thinking: Non-Linear Warfare and Reflexive Control, Research Paper, NATO Defense College, No. 121, November 2015

<sup>33</sup> <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/03/assessing-russia-s-reorganized-and-rearmed-military-pub-69853>

## Russian Weaknesses

### Chronic Economic Stagnation

The Russian economy under Putin is caught in a bear trap between chronic stagnation and pervasive corruption. It is the consensus of the majority of observers that the Russian economy faces a prolonged period of economic stagnation.

The Russian economy is stagnating across almost all sectors, meaning that boosting growth will be impossible without deep structural reforms. But with President Vladimir Putin approaching a fourth term after having shown little appetite for such reform, there is no reason to expect much to change in the foreseeable future.<sup>34</sup>

An analysis by the *Financial Times* echoes this observation. This examination concludes that structural flaws in the Russian political system and approach to the management of the economy all but ensures a protracted period of economic stagnation.

The main problem is that Russia is still failing to invest enough. More than two years before the recession started, investment growth had already slowed sharply, and one year before the slump began, investment was falling. The lack of investment shows everywhere: low levels of industrial automation paired with a rapidly ageing and shrinking workforce; weak infrastructure; increasing bureaucracy; and corruption are driving production and transaction costs up, hampering attempts to compete with other emerging markets.<sup>35</sup>

One well respected analyst of the Russian economic and political scene, Vladislav Inozemtsev, provided an even bleaker assessment of Russia's recent economic history:

Between 2008 and 2015, average annual growth has been close to zero; capital flight has accelerated; foreign investors have been sidelined; the business climate has deteriorated; and dozens of taxes have been newly introduced or increased. Military expenditures doubled as President Vladimir Putin launched military operations in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria, and he appears to have completely shifted his interest from economic matters to the geopolitical sphere.<sup>36</sup>

Inozemtsev went on to state that the combination of domestic disinvestment in productive infrastructure, the withdrawal of Western companies from Russian projects, capital flight and increased corruption is likely to lead to a protracted period of economic decline. The regime's apparent determination to meet growing Western opposition to its aggressive activities with more sanctions will unquestionably exacerbate the combination of Western disinvestment and capital flight.

Furthermore, the inability to diversify the economy leaves Russia dependent on its energy sector as its primary source of foreign currency earnings. Energy exports also are employed as an

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/russia-economic-stagnation-structural-reform-by-konstantin-sonin-2018-02>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/3aac3faa-1bb6-11e8-aaca-4574d7dabfb6>

<sup>36</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/russias-economy-of-disillusionment/2016/01/17/0803598e-bb97-11e5-829c-26ffb874a18d\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.2b3e1f747f49](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/russias-economy-of-disillusionment/2016/01/17/0803598e-bb97-11e5-829c-26ffb874a18d_story.html?utm_term=.2b3e1f747f49)

instrument of political coercion and a means of corrupting politicians and government officials in Eastern Europe.

Russia is meddling in the energy sectors of Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia, as well as throughout the Balkans. In all of these countries, Moscow has been trying to buy into the large energy companies.<sup>37</sup>

This dependence also means that Russia is extremely vulnerable to changes in the global production of hydrocarbons as well as to the impacts of sanctions that limit access to Western sources of financing and technology for energy projects. Reducing Russia's involvement in the energy economies of Eastern and Central Europe will also be critical to countering Moscow's campaign to undermine the political stability of these countries.

The combination of what veteran analyst Nicholas Eberstadt called "Russia's demographic disaster" and persistent underinvestment in social infrastructure will further constrain that country's economic performance. It even could lead to growing disaffection with Putin's leadership and, potentially, political unrest. In Eberstadt's view:

Indeed, the troubles caused by Russia's population trends – in health, education, family formation, and other spheres – represent a previously unprecedented phenomenon for an urbanized, literate society not at war. Such demographic problems are far outside the norm for both developed and less developed countries today; what is more, their causes are not entirely understood. There is also little evidence that Russia's political leadership has been able to enact policies that have any long-term hope of correcting this slide. This peacetime population crisis threatens Russia's economic outlook, its ambitions to modernize and develop, and quite possibly its security.

In other words, Russia's demographic travails have terrible and outsized implications, both for those inside the country's borders and for those beyond. The humanitarian toll has already been immense, and the continuing economic cost threatens to be huge; no less important, Russia's demographic decline portends ominously for the external behavior of the Kremlin, which will have to confront a far less favorable power balance than it had been banking on.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, in contrast to the situation that existed during the Cold War, Russia is tied to the global economic system in terms of its need for capital and technology. This provides the West with an enormous competitive advantage. This is apparent by the impact of relatively mild sanctions imposed on Russia after the occupation of Crimea.<sup>39</sup> The additional sanctions imposed following Moscow's attempt to destabilize Ukraine have further inhibited Russia's economic growth.

To diversify its resource-dependent economy and modernize its aging, Soviet-era infrastructure, Russia has counted on an inflow of Western capital and technology. To the degree that this option is lost, Moscow will be forced to become vastly more dependent either on its relationship with Beijing – in which it is a distinctly junior partner – or on

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<sup>37</sup> <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/51132?lang=en>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2011-11-01/dying-bear>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2015/Russia/sanctions-after-crimea-have-they-worked/EN/index.htm>

scattered partnerships with countries that do not offer anything resembling the resources of the United States and Europe.<sup>40</sup>

In essence, the long-term trajectory of the Russian economy appears set in stone. The political and social impacts of chronic stagnation and corruption are likely to encourage Putin's authoritarian impulses and his desperate determination to restore Russia's status as a great power.

Dr. Stephen Blank argues persuasively that a major element of Putin's strategy for competition with the West involves the militarization of Russia's economy.<sup>41</sup> This is essential if Russia is to build the military Putin believes is necessary to deter the West. In addition, Russian leaders appear to believe that a robust defense-industrial complex can serve as the engine for the overall economy. In contrast to the U.S. military, which sees the private sector as the primary source of innovation, Russian leaders view the defense sector as the place where innovation takes place.

Over the long-term, the effort to militarize the Russian state is likely to cause further erosion of its economic position. This is likely to be the case even in the absence of a U.S. and NATO effort to compete more effectively with Russia and to challenge its military buildup with one of their own.

However, the Russian economy is already ill-equipped to support the Kremlin's ambitions. The combination of intensified sanctions, a changing global energy environment and the rising costs of Russian overseas operations could threaten not only Putin's political-military strategy but the stability of the regime itself.

Russia's reduced economic prospects have important domestic and international implications. Regime legitimacy in Putin's fourth presidential term will not be sustained with the kind of rapid increases in personal wealth that characterized the 2000s. Russia's status as a rising power will be challenged as it lags behind other emerging markets and even many industrialized economies. The affordability of Putin's assertive foreign policy and ambitious rearmament plans will be called into question.<sup>42</sup>

## **The Inherent Political Weaknesses of Russian Authoritarianism**

Russia is weak politically as well as economically. In contrast to the political and economic structures common to the democratic world, it has long been recognized that the Russian government is a dysfunctional entity controlled by a small coterie of officials, many with secret policy or intelligence backgrounds. The Russian political system is based on ever tightening controls from the top of all the instruments of power and more and more of the economy.

For a period of time in the mid-2000s, there was a debate among Western observers regarding the degree to which Putin was seeking authoritarian control over the Russian state and whether there was room for eventual liberalization. That debate is now over. As Dr. Karen Dawisha succinctly put it, "Putin and his circle sought to create an authoritarian regime ruled by a close-

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<sup>40</sup> <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2014-06-16/managing-new-cold-war>

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Blank, *Moscow's Competitive Strategy*, paper prepared for the Lexington Institute's competitive strategies study, December 2017

<sup>42</sup> <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/2018/02/06/russias-economic-prospects-modernisation-or-stagnation/>

knit cabal with embedded interests, plans, and capabilities, who used democracy for decoration rather than direction.”<sup>43</sup>

At one time, when the Russian economy was growing, there was a workable implicit bargain between Putin, his circle of cronies and the Russian people. One longtime observer of the Russian scene put it thus, “Stay out of politics and thrive. Interfere, presume, overstep and you will meet a harsh fate.”<sup>44</sup> However, the combination of declining oil revenues, rising inflation, a devalued ruble, increased competition from abroad, massive capital flight, higher expenditures on security forces and, most recently, Western sanctions, has destroyed the basis for this bargain between the governing and the governed.

Inside the ruling elite, longstanding competition over power and property has intensified as the resource base has shrunk. The “economic storm” has caused “bewilderment” and nervousness at the top, since the elites did not anticipate the West’s determination to impose effective sanctions and underestimated the effects of those sanctions.<sup>45</sup>

Kleptocracies, like mafia families, have relatively little interest in creating conflict unless it is somehow related to their financial interests. As Michael Corleone observed in the movie *The Godfather*, “It’s not personal. It’s strictly business.” But the business must be protected. There is the rub. The Russian economy today is highly dysfunctional. But at the same time the current leadership cannot risk economic reforms.

It is difficult for those in the West to appreciate the magnitude of the corruption and its impact on the Russian economy. It is at the heart of the country’s current economic crisis. According to Sergei Guriev, foreign investors are avoiding Russia and domestic ones are fleeing the country. “The level of corruption in Russia is on par with that of the poorest countries in the world.”<sup>46</sup>

Beyond corruption, there is the growth of organized crime in Russia. Mark Galeotti, possibly the West’s premier scholar on organized crime in Russia, has documented the ever-closer relationship between organized crime and the Russian state. Certainly, this relationship between organized crime and the state is based on mutual interests. But it is also a reflection of shared mindset.

A number of commentators have dubbed Russia a “mafia state.” It is certainly a catchy epithet, but what does it actually mean? To the Spanish prosecutor José Grinda González – a particular scourge of Russian gangs in his country – it means that the Kremlin (or at least the state security apparatus), rather than being under the control of the criminals, is a shadowy puppeteer making the gangs dance on its strings. The truth is more complex. The Kremlin does not control organised crime in Russia, nor is it controlled by it. Rather, organised crime prospers under Putin, because it can go with the grain of his system.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.libertylawsite.org/2015/02/18/putins-russia-a-conversation-with-karen-dawisha/#sthash.VAOrWVKC.dpuf>.

<sup>44</sup> David Remnick, “Putin and the Exile,” *The New Yorker*, April 28, 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Donald N. Jensen, “Russia’s Elite Battle Over a Shrinking Economic Pie,” Institute of Modern Russia, October 21, 2015, <http://imrussia.org/en/analysis/politics/2454-russia’s-elites-battle-over-a-shrinking-economic-pie>.

<sup>46</sup> Sergei Guriev, “Political Origins and Implications of the Economic Crisis in Russia,” in Leon Aron, ed., *Putin’s Russia: How it Rose, How it is Maintained and How it Might End*, The American Enterprise Institute, Washington, DC, May 2015.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/23/how-organised-crime-took-over-russia-vory-super-mafia>

The true measure of the Kremlin kleptocracy's impact on Russia is not in diminished economic performance, the expanding gap between rich and poor or even the flow of wealth out of the country, but in the growing infighting amongst the elite and the ever increasing need for tighter controls leading, in the views of one well-respected observer, "to the increasing risk that the country will be driven into a renewed hard authoritarian regime."<sup>48</sup> But the kleptocracy is ingrained, and is an essential part of the exercise of power in Russia. Hence, despite its impact on the overall economy, it is inconceivable that the Kremlin will be able to reform itself in order to save the country.

It is important to recognize that there are few restraints remaining on the way Putin chooses to exercise power. There are no alternative, legitimate institutions that can act as a brake on presidential diktats. There is no equivalent of so-called doves in the Soviet system that many in the West believed exercised restraint on the more bellicose members of the leadership.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, Moscow's effort to exert ever greater control over the Russian economy, regions and people inevitably will lead to resistance at the local level and increased disillusionment with the government, generally, and Putin, in particular. The result may be a systemic crisis in the central government's ability to rule.<sup>50</sup>

Fiona Hill, now Senior Director for Europe and Russia at the National Security Council, stated the point in the starkest terms: "the increased preponderance of power in the Kremlin has created greater risk for the Russian political system now more than at any other juncture in recent history."<sup>51</sup>

Recent moves by Putin to create a so-called National Guard must be viewed as an acknowledgement of the profound dysfunctions in the Russian political and economic systems. Also, it is an effort to further insulate himself and a few close associates from the kind of pressure and even resistance that his poor decisions could produce.

Over the past several years, power has gravitated to the security services and the military, in particular. Putin created competing centers of power including multiple security services and allowed them to fight amongst themselves over various pieces of the national economy. Now, much of the security services' power has been withdrawn and the military will be confronted by a sizeable National Guard – a true presidential army.<sup>52</sup>

The foregoing discussion illustrates the extent to which Russian foreign and defense policies are increasingly driven by domestic factors, specifically by the growing challenges to Putin's ability to maintain power. The current economic and political systems virtually guarantee Russia's continual decline. This is at the core of the Kremlin's threat perceptions and its increasing need either to alter Russia's relationship with the outside world or to isolate itself from that world.

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<sup>48</sup> Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia*, Simon and Shuster, New York, 2014, p. 347.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Goble, "Does Anyone in Russia Have Any Influence on Putin Anymore?" Window on Eurasia, July 14, 2016, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2016/07/does-anyone-in-russia-have-any.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Evgeny Gontmakher, "Russian Federalism: Reality of Myth?" in Aron, ed., *op. cit.*

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in "Enter Tsar Vladimir," *The Economist*, October 28, 2017, p.25

<sup>52</sup> Nikolai Petrov, "How Putin Changed the Balance of Power Among Russia's Elite," *Moscow Times*, April 15, 2016; Ilan Berman, "Putin Consolidates Domestic Power," *World Affairs*, Winter 2016; Karen Orlova, "The Siloviki Shuffle: On His Majesty's Secret Servides," *The American Interest*, June 29, 2016.

In essence, the Kremlin believes that there is no way for the regime to be secure internally so long as the West is free to present itself not merely as an alternate political-economic model but one that is clearly superior to Russia's. As a long-time Russia analyst concluded, Russia has no choice but to challenge the existing international system:

Putin has rejected structural, internal economic and political reforms, fearing that like Gorbachev he too could be swept from power. Putin's choice reflects a view that Russia can *only* address its non-competitiveness by changing the world around Russia, and most critically, by changing the European security system. In Putin's view, any solution short of *changing* the European security system – including full integration, separation by erecting new walls, freezing the status quo around Russia, or partnering with other countries to counter-balance the powers in the European system – only means Russia's inevitable loss of great power status and the loss of [Putin's] personal power at home.<sup>53</sup>

With his election to another term as president, it appears as if Putin's political preeminence is firmly established. However, the credibility and stability of the regime is ever-more closely tied to the person of Vladimir Putin. This raises serious questions regarding the long-term viability of Russia's ruling system.

Russia, though outwardly stable, is approaching its own major crisis as the political regime created by Putin faces an uncertain future after the eventual departure of its figurehead. Putin's Kremlin is already working on a political transition that would rejuvenate the elite and improve its competence and performance, but, at the same time, Russian society is also changing and Putin's heirs cannot take its support for granted. Gross inequality, sluggish economic growth, low vertical mobility, and high-level corruption will present a range of serious challenges to the future Russian leadership.<sup>54</sup>

### **Russia Has Few Friends And Even Weaker Allies**

Much focus on concerns about Russia's threat to Europe has been on Moscow's campaign to fracture NATO and the European Union (EU), discredit Western political and economic institutions and undermine the stability of individual governments.<sup>55</sup> Relatively little attention has been devoted to the circumstances of the states bordering Russia, those that Moscow views as essential to its military security and political stability. As Janusz Bugaiski observed:

Unlike the United States, Russia has few genuine allies. The handful of countries that enter Moscow-led organizations or engage in joint military exercises are either intimidated or enticed to participate. Washington needs to take a closer look at these fragile alliances to see where it can develop ties with countries that seek closer Western links and diminish Russia's onslaught on their sovereignty.<sup>56</sup>

How many nations can Russia call a friend, much less an ally? The answer, is few. Moreover, those nations nominally allied to Russia are mostly militarily weak and politically suspect. This is particularly true with respect to the former Soviet republics. Moscow's efforts to create a new

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<sup>53</sup> <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/Putins%20Choice%20web.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> <http://carnegie.ru/2018/01/25/avoiding-u.s.-russia-military-escalation-during-hybrid-war-pub-75277>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/kremlin-playbook>

<sup>56</sup> <http://cepa.org/EuropesEdge/Russias-reluctant-allies>

sphere of influence encompassing these states, formalized through the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization have had only limited success.

Russia's primary ally and client in Eastern Europe is Belarus. Some observers view Belarus as a clone of Putin's Russia. However, there is significant evidence that Belarus is trying to balance its precarious position between Russia and NATO Europe. The annexation of Crimea by Russia and the intervention in Ukraine appears to have altered the way the Minsk government views its own security and the potential threat posed by Moscow.

Today, Belarus President Lukashenko is walking a tightrope between maintaining his nation's sovereignty and not offending Moscow. Minsk has shown a degree of independence from Russia, particularly on economic issues.<sup>57</sup> Last year, Lukashenko accused Russia of using its monopoly position as an energy supplier to Belarus to coerce that country's government, saying "independence cannot be compared with oil."<sup>58</sup>

Belarus seeks to leverage its critical political and military role in Putin's plans to rebuild Russian power. But its position between Russia and Europe makes it susceptible to the centrifugal force exerted by the latter. The potential benefits from closer association to the EU are difficult for Belarus to ignore. This reality must cause Moscow to constantly be concerned for the stability of its relationship with Belarus.

Moscow's plans to make Belarus a cornerstone of its Eurasian integration project look increasingly unsuccessful. Minsk may be a founding member of the Eurasian Economic Union, but from Russia's perspective it has also become the most frustrating member, constantly demanding new funds while simultaneously improving ties with the West. Strong-arming Minsk ought to be easy, but Russia has discovered how few tools it has to coerce Belarus, especially when the Kremlin's budget is tight. Given its culture, history, and economy, no country is a more natural member of the "Russian world" than Belarus. Over the past two years, no country has done more to demonstrate the weakness of Russian efforts to reestablish hegemony in the post-Soviet space.<sup>59</sup>

Other Russian allies in Europe and Central Asia appear to be following a similar policy approach as Belarus. Several have been silent with respect to Moscow's annexation of Crimea and intervention in Ukraine. A number have sought to loosen their economic ties with Russia. While none will openly break with Moscow, neither will they be energetic participants in Putin's plans to assert Russian power along its borders.

Russia's policy with respect to Belarus and the other members of its security system is largely defensive in nature. Moscow seeks to prevent further NATO expansion and limit U.S. and European influence over nations that form Russia's buffer to the west, southwest and south.

To that end, Russia is willing to see the creation of a belt of failed states on its and NATO's periphery, rather than allow them to become part of the West. Russia can tolerate these states being nominally pro-West, as long as they are not integrated into the Western system. This is the ultimate objective in Ukraine.

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<sup>57</sup><http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-belarus-russia-relations-20170308-story.html>

<sup>58</sup><http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/06/what-exactly-is-going-on-between-russia-and-belarus/>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/04/04/belarus-and-the-failure-of-the-russian-world/>

Beyond the states of the former Soviet Union, Russia's set of friends and allies is remarkably weak. Virtually all of the states with which Russia has a relationship are net consumers of security and resources. In some cases, such as Syria, their location and willingness to allow Russia access to ports and other military facilities serves larger Russian interests.

The one exception is Russia's relationship with China. Russia and China have been working towards closer political, economic and security ties for a number of years. Dr. Stephen Blank characterizes this relationship as a de facto alliance.

This relationship has evolved since 2014 into a real alliance where China is the rider and Russia the horse. Thus, Moscow, to implement its anti-Western strategy on a global basis, must have and increasingly depends on both material and intangible political diplomatic support from China. A starker but not altogether different way of putting this is that Russia increasingly can play the great or superpower game against the West because China allows it to and thus Moscow's claim to superpower or system-creating status in world politics increasingly depends on Chinese forbearance and support, both material and intangible.<sup>60</sup>

Yet, as the junior partner in this relationship, Russia is vulnerable to a change in Beijing's strategic calculus. Chinese strategic literature suggests a high degree of ambivalence regarding, to borrow a phrase from President Washington, "entangling alliances."<sup>61</sup> It is not clear how much support Beijing is willing to give to Russian security priorities in Europe and the Middle East.

### **Russia's "One Shot" Military**

The successful occupation of Crimea and the current operations to destabilize Eastern Ukraine belie the general weakness of Russia's conventional military forces. Successive modernization campaigns have run afoul of budget difficulties, weaknesses in the country's military-industrial complex, the inability to shift from a conscript-based to a professional military, a limited pool of acceptable recruits and political infighting. Efforts to mimic Western militaries' transformation from quantity to quality in security forces have been only partly successful.

Despite a significant increase in defense spending in recent years, the Russian military not only lacks sufficient modern equipment, but many of the critical enablers to support the kind of high-intensity, fast-paced, information-intensive operations that the U.S. and a number of its allies can conduct. Russia has had to go to foreign suppliers, including NATO countries, for such capabilities as amphibious warfare ships, unmanned aerial vehicles and even training facilities.

Nonetheless, Russia has developed and demonstrated a capability for conducting a kind of quasi-military campaign designed to achieve ends equivalent to those formerly attainable only by military means but with a diminished risk of actual war with NATO. According to a report by the Defense Committee of the United Kingdom's Parliament:

The Russian deployment of asymmetric tactics represents a new challenge to NATO. Events in Ukraine demonstrate in particular Russia's ability to effectively paralyse an opponent in the pursuit of its interests with a range of tools including psychological

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<sup>60</sup> Dr. Stephen Blank, Moscow's Competitive Strategy, paper prepared for the Lexington Institute's competitive strategies study, December 2017

<sup>61</sup> <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/china-russia-alliance-20333>

operations, information warfare and intimidation with massing of conventional forces. Such operations may be designed to slip below NATO's threshold for reaction. In many circumstances, such operations are also deniable, increasing the difficulties for an adversary in mounting a credible and legitimate response.<sup>62</sup>

It is clear that the Putin regime has built a conventional military machine that is capable of posing a serious threat to its immediate European neighbors, including members of NATO. According to the Defense Intelligence Agency's 2017 report, *Russian Military Power*:

Although Russia's military strategy is officially defensive, the Russian Ground Troops' basic principle of land warfare is violent, sustained, and deep offensive action, just as it was during the Soviet era. Mechanized and armored formations supported by aviation and artillery are to seize the initiative at the outset of hostilities, penetrate the enemy's defenses, and drive deeply and decisively into the enemy's rear area.<sup>63</sup>

However, many Western leaders and defense analysts focus too much on the actual capabilities of the Russian military to engage in a high-end conventional conflict. The Russian military is an extremely brittle instrument. It will be decades, if ever, before Russia will pose a conventional threat to NATO writ large. Rather, it is the role of Russian conventional capabilities as an escalatory threat and a backstop to its quasi-military activities that is most threatening.

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.<sup>64</sup>

In addition, Moscow may believe that its superiority in theater nuclear weapons and a modernized strategic nuclear force posture allows the option of escalation in response to a failed or stalled asymmetric/conventional offensive. The Russian reliance on long-range precision strike systems and nuclear forces both for deterrence and escalation control is likely to increase over time, despite the desire to create a conventional deterrent based on advanced weapons and a new force structure.

One of the primary reasons for this is Russia's demographic disaster which makes even filling the ranks of the current, smaller force difficult. Another reason is Russia's long-term budgetary

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<sup>62</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, "Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part Two – NATO," Third Report of Session 2014-15, July 31, 2014, p. 17, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmdfence/358/358.pdf>.

<sup>63</sup><http://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/Russia%20Military%20Power%20Report%202017.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> Keir Giles, *Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power*, Research Paper, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Chatham House, March 2016, p. 19.

challenges. Nuclear weapons are cheaper than an effective advanced conventional deterrent and, in Russia's case, much easier to build and maintain.

The Kremlin knows it has neither the time nor the resources to reconstruct a great power military. It must act in the near term to create the conditions that will, in effect, insulate Russia from the forces of global economic and political change. Moscow understands that it is at a serious disadvantage if confronted by the united economic and military power of the Western Alliance.

Given the disparity in overall military and economic power, full-scale, prolonged, and conventional conflict with NATO would be likely to entail unsustainable losses for Russia. Any options for use of the military to challenge the West must therefore count on a swift resolution, exploiting Russia's local superiority before the full but distant potential of the West is brought to bear.<sup>65</sup>

The West will have to figure out how to help those living in Russia's neighborhood withstand the kind of tactics and forces Moscow employed in Crimea and is currently employing in Eastern Ukraine, pose a credible counter to Russian conventional forces and deter the threats posed by that country's long-range conventional and nuclear weapons.

For decades, Russian military writings emphasized the central role that long-range precision weapons would play in future conflicts. The current modernization program has enabled the Russian military to deploy a new generation of advanced, long-range precision weapons. The experience in Syria has given the Russian leadership and military a taste for precision-strike warfare. Russia's Ministry of Defense has made it clear that precision strike weapons and related capabilities will dominate the next phase of its rearmament program.<sup>66</sup>

However, at present, the Russian military lacks sufficient platforms, munitions stockpiles and industrial capacity to construct the kind of high-end conventional military it desires, much less to conduct a high-end conflict of any length.<sup>67</sup> The rapid evolution of Western capabilities in sensors, automated target recognition and stealth will continually challenge Moscow's efforts to keep pace in the precision strike regime. In addition, Russia has only a limited production capacity for many precision systems. It is likely to be difficult for the Kremlin to make the necessary investment in research and development (R&D) and production in this area while simultaneously seeking to modernize most other elements of the military.<sup>68</sup>

In addition, Russia lacks the ISR and command, control and communications capabilities to support a large-scale, long-range precision strike campaign. This is particularly the case with respect to targeting naval systems. Russian conventional strike systems are probably sufficient to execute devastating strikes against NATO installations and other fixed targets, particularly in the absence of adequate theater air and missile defenses.

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<sup>65</sup> <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/03/assessing-russia-s-reorganized-and-rearmed-military-pub-69853>

<sup>66</sup> [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/11/30/high-technology\\_set\\_to\\_dominat\\_russias\\_rearmament\\_program\\_112702.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/11/30/high-technology_set_to_dominat_russias_rearmament_program_112702.html)

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.ffi.no/no/Rapporter/17-00979.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.ffi.no/no/Rapporter/17-00979.pdf>

However, there is evidence that the Russian precision strike campaign in Syria has been less than entirely successful, even when going after fixed targets.<sup>69</sup> Against mobile forces, Russian strike systems will be challenged to achieve target quality information.

Russian Ground Forces have undergone significant modernization over the past 15 years. They are organized, equipped and postured for limited offensive and defensive operations. However, the Russian military overall lacks sufficient structure and reserves to support protracted high-intensity combat or to allow it to seize and control significant territory.

Russia has a limited ground force, which keeps it from undertaking large-scale military operations. Russia can likely muster around 50,000-60,000 combat troops within a few weeks for high-end conflicts and would likely require an additional 40,000-plus support troops. This is sufficient to conduct moderate-sized military operations, but seizing and holding territory would require more forces. Given that the entire ground force is only around 330,000-340,000 strong and that only a portion is combat ready, Russia remains limited in the manpower available for offensive operations.

Russia's reserve system for introducing reinforcements or replacing attritional units is still in the early stages of development. A reserve system for deploying territorial defense battalions has been established, but it is meant for civil defense at home and guarding infrastructure, while the system for active ground forces is in the pilot phase.

The Russian Armed Forces also lack the logistics infrastructure to support intensive combat, particularly if offensive operations, even in one theater, are involved. A logistics system that operates along internal lines of communications where the military can rely on the extensive railroad system, gives Russia some advantages, particularly if on the defensive.

Russia is quite weak in other areas as well. Its ability to transport troops by means other than rail is a particular problem, with limited airlift capability that is unlikely to improve significantly in the near term. When combined with Russia's poor road network, this creates a serious vulnerability should an adversary be able to destroy key rail hubs or lines.<sup>70</sup>

Although there have been some improvements in logistics recently, Russia remains well behind the U.S. and its NATO allies in its ability to use electronic means to manage the battlespace. The Russian military is only a decade away from being dependent on unsecured radios and cell phones for communication between headquarters and frontline commanders.

Secure electronic command and control (C2) systems have been developed and deployed at brigade and division levels, but the extent to which commanders are comfortable with using such systems is unclear. For example, Russia planned to deploy an automated C2 system across 40 brigades, but variants are still in testing with individual units.

The Kremlin's rearmament program has managed to restore a measure of capability to the Russian Armed Forces in recent years. In certain areas, notably air defense, electronic warfare, special operations forces and nuclear weapons, the Russian military deploys capable systems and units. However, the overall state of the current military reform efforts and prospects for the next round of modernization are uncertain. As a recent report by the Carnegie Endowment concluded:

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<sup>69</sup><https://www.eurasiareview.com/15102015-russian-airpower-in-syria-an-emphasis-on-precision-strike-analysis/>

<sup>70</sup> [www.armyupress.army.mil/.../Russia/2017-07-The-Russian-Way-of-War-Grau-Bartles.pdf](http://www.armyupress.army.mil/.../Russia/2017-07-The-Russian-Way-of-War-Grau-Bartles.pdf)

Russia's military reform program has been inconsistent and incomplete and has failed to correct several serious shortcomings. These include limited sustainability and strategic mobility due to inadequate logistics, rear-area support, and transportation assets; chronically undermanned and poorly trained units that continue to rely on a disproportionate number of short-term conscripts and a limited cadre of contract service personnel and noncommissioned officers; and a defense industry that continues to churn out inferior equipment as a result of corruption, poor management, backward technology, the loss of access to niche defense industries in Ukraine, and Western sanctions that have undermined Russia's ability to import dual-use technologies and adapt them for military systems.<sup>71</sup>

There is evidence to suggest that President Putin will be hard pressed to find sufficient budget resources to support even the current military modernization program. The combination of low oil prices, rent seeking behaviors by the elites and Western sanctions is forcing Moscow to look for ways to economize. Domestic discretionary spending has already been cut and Putin made addressing domestic priorities a major theme of his recent presidential campaign. These factors led one experienced Western analyst to conclude that:

Excessive spending on the military may indeed be unsustainable in the long term. After all, this was a major contributor to state collapse in Russia at least twice during the twentieth century (in 1991, 1917, and, more debatably, 1905) and routinely served as the catalyst for major social upheaval in previous centuries. But that does not alter the fact that in the short and medium terms, Russia is purchasing for itself substantial increases in capability.

For now, respectable levels of new equipment types are being delivered, especially in the Western Military District, with rates of delivery continuing to increase—even though the burst of activity toward the end of 2016 led one commentator to suggest that “Russian defense industry retains the Soviet tradition of ‘storming,’ or last-minute rush work to meet the annual production plan. You might not want a ride on a Russian helo assembled in December.”<sup>72</sup>

Budgetary and industrial constraints have had and will continue to exert a negative influence over a number of sectors of the defense-industrial complex. In addition, prioritization in the state budget on defense poses a broader threat to the overall Russian economy.

Challenges, partly due to Western sanctions, have slowed production for some weapons and equipment. Russian industry's dependence on weapons production, the depreciation of the ruble, and growing interest rates on industrial loans, which are used to finance facility modernization and production expenses, have increased business costs for Russian defense firms. Russian economists have warned that the resulting imbalance between civilian and military spending could be problematic.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/13/new-nato-russia-military-balance-implications-for-european-security-pub-68222>

<sup>72</sup> <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/03/assessing-russia-s-reorganized-and-rearmed-military-pub-69853>

<sup>73</sup>

<http://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/Russia%20Military%20Power%20Report%202017.pdf>

The breakup of the Soviet Union, particularly Ukraine's independence, did severe damage to the defense industry's supply chain. It took the Ukrainian defense ministry nearly two decades to reconstruct this system. Russia's aggression against Ukraine undermined much of this effort.

Emergency measures were taken in 2014 in order to replace, by the end of 2017, some 700 types of components that were produced by Ukrainian companies and imported by Russia. In reality, much indeed remains to be done, as Russia still critically depends on foreign procurement for key military hardware and components, including the creation of a genuinely indigenous technological and industrial base for basic electronic components as well as engines for its Navy.<sup>74</sup>

Quality control in defense production is lacking, especially in ship building. Most Russian shipyards are in dire straits. Maintenance and logistics for the Navy are extremely poor.<sup>75</sup> In addition, the Navy simply is not receiving the necessary resources to address almost three decades of neglect. According to one recent analysis, "chronic economic constraints and a dysfunctional shipbuilding industry mean that operations beyond Russia's shores are likely to be the exception rather than the norm."<sup>76</sup>

### Weaknesses In Russian Nuclear Strategy And Forces

Russia has built a comprehensive array of theater and strategic nuclear capabilities and has integrated them into its strategy for conducting operations against NATO across the conflict spectrum. It is important to recognize that nuclear weapons play an important part in the Russian approach to hybrid warfare. According to Dmitry Adamsky, a noted expert on Russian military affairs:

The presence of nuclear weapons is perhaps the first critical component for modern hybrid warfare. Nuclear weapons provide insurance against a massive ground response to an incremental limited war. The offensive nation that possesses nuclear weapons knows that the adversary or its allies will not likely commit large ground forces to a conflict for fear of the aggressor employing those weapons against ground [or naval] forces. This dynamic emboldens the aggressor nation. In the case of Russia, its possession of nuclear weapons emboldens leaders to take offensive action because they know that even the threat of nuclear employment forces potential adversaries to a standstill.<sup>77</sup>

It is generally believed that Moscow wishes to reduce its reliance on nuclear weapons in its foreign and security policies. While there has been progress in equipping the Russian Armed Forces with the kind of conventional systems that would substitute for nuclear weapons, the quantity and quality of these new capabilities are not such as to obviate reliance on the latter.

Russian nuclear forces and concepts of operations are not without certain weaknesses that the U.S. and NATO should consider exploiting in order to shore up deterrence.

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<sup>74</sup> <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/entangling-the-ups-downs-russias-military-industrial-complex-21348>

<sup>75</sup> <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/the-russian-navy-powerful-suffers-2-big-fatal-flaws-19657>

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<https://www.foi.se/download/18.264a15c615872434ccd7b4/1479479365544/Economic+and+technological+constraints+.pdf>

<sup>77</sup> Cited in Blank, Paper for the Lexington Institute

Russia's nuclear forces and strategy also present a number of weaknesses, however, that could be subject to Western exploitation. Russia does not prefer dependence on nuclear weapons, but is forced to rely on them largely in order to offset conventional disadvantages. This creates a number of problems, including imposing demands for rapid escalation in the case of successful initial operations by opposing forces. In addition, leaders in Moscow must confront the prospect that limited nuclear warfare might be conducted across the depths of Russia's homeland if NATO honors commitments to the Baltic states and the conflict escalates to the nuclear level.<sup>78</sup>

## The Battle For Advantage In Advanced Technology

For decades Soviet leaders lived in fear of Western technological advances that "offset" Moscow's efforts to achieve usable military advantages. The Russian defense modernization program is largely focused on countering perceived Western military-technological advantage.

In some instances, such as stealth and long-range precision strike, the Russian defense ministry is responding to a well-recognized Western military strength. In others, for example, conventional prompt global strike, Moscow anticipates that the U.S. will pursue such a capability regardless of how little has actually been invested in the necessary R&D.

The development of space-based and futuristic weapons based on "new physical principles" as well as nuclear and conventional buildups all derive from Russian fears of Western and especially U.S. technological, economic and military superiority. Therefore, all these programs are intended to offset those forms of Western superiority.

Those systems that Moscow fears most are the U.S. missile defense program in Europe and Asia, conventional prompt global strike and Western designs on the Arctic. Consequently, weapons programs aim to deny the U.S. the utility of the missile defense network or the ability to launch global conventional strikes without suffering heavy losses. President Putin made Moscow's concerns about U.S. plans for a global missile defense system explicit in his March 1 address to the Federal Assembly:

In light of the plans to build a global anti-ballistic missile system, which are still being carried out today, all agreements signed within the framework of New START are now gradually being devaluated, because while the number of carriers and weapons is being reduced, one of the parties, namely the U.S, is permitting constant, uncontrolled growth of the number of anti-ballistic missiles, improving their quality, and creating new missile launching areas. If we do not do something, eventually this will result in the complete devaluation of Russia's nuclear potential. Meaning that all of our missiles could simply be intercepted.<sup>79</sup>

In the non-kinetic field, it has long been the case that Moscow deeply believes that the U.S. and Europe are waging information warfare against Russia to undermine the Putin system of governance even though there is no intention or desire by the U.S. government to do so.

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<sup>78</sup> Jacob Kipp and Matthew Kroenig, *Russian Nuclear Weapons Programs: Strengths and Weaknesses*, paper for the Lexington Institute, July 2017

<sup>79</sup> <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>

While Russia is clearly developing anti-satellite and other space weapons as well as hypersonics, it is not clear that it possesses an advantage over the U.S. in this area. Russia tested an anti-satellite weapon in 2016 and recently announced it is building one.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, current Russian nuclear programs include some hypersonic weapons systems, e.g. a new stealthy heavy bomber that will carry cruise missiles and reportedly hypersonic missiles.

In addition, the Project 4202 vehicle that is to be delivered by the SS-19 Stiletto missile is also intended to be hypersonic.<sup>81</sup> Hypersonic vehicles or alternatively boost-glide vehicles that travel at speeds between Mach 5 and Mach 10 (3840 to 7680 miles per hour) and use sophisticated technologies for maneuvering and boost that allow them to deliver warheads rapidly, evade defenses and target precisely.

This allows for high rates of survivability against missile defense systems. These qualities excite Russian designers and planners because Moscow fully believes that the U.S. ballistic missile defense system now being built in Europe and Asia aims, despite all abundant evidence to the contrary, to neutralize Russia's nuclear strike capability against the West. This explains the obsession of Russian leaders to build supposedly invulnerable nuclear weapons, like hypersonics, that cannot be attacked by missile defenses.<sup>82</sup>

At the same time, these investments reflect the healthy respect if not actual awe that Moscow has for Western technological and economic capabilities even as it deprecates the West as a decadent civilization. It is not surprising, therefore, that in 2013, the Russian government stood up the Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Defense Industry, characterized by observers as Moscow's version of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

But it also has elements of the Pentagon's Defense Innovation Unit-Experimental and even the Hacking for Defense program that matches hard defense technology problems with advanced university students. Among the projects the foundation is said to be supporting are: a flying car, unmanned underwater vehicles, robotic combat systems and military artificial intelligence.<sup>83</sup>

## **A Competitive Strategy For Dealing With An Authoritarian, Unstable And Heavily Armed Russian Regime**

It is important to recognize that the challenge facing NATO and the U.S. is not from any particular element of Russian power – asymmetric, hybrid, conventional or nuclear. Nor is it the Russian nation or its leadership. Rather, it is to defeat Putin's strategy for what Keir Giles calls "breakout", thereby denying Moscow the ability to disrupt the existing international order at minimum risk and an acceptable price.

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<sup>80</sup> "Russia Will Create a Weapon To Destroy Satellites," [www.micetimes.asia](http://www.micetimes.asia) November 30, 2017; Weston Williams, "Russia Launches New Anti-Satellite Weapon: a New War Front In Space?" *Christian Science Monitor*, December 22, 2016; <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Military/2016/1222/Russia-launches-anti-satellite-weapon-A-new-warfront-in-space>

<sup>81</sup> "Flight Test Of a New Project 4202 Vehicle," [www.russianforces.org](http://www.russianforces.org), March 3, 2015

<sup>82</sup> "Russian Top Secret Hypersonic Glider Can Penetrate Any Missile Defense," <http://m.sputniknews.com>, June 13, 2016

<sup>83</sup> <https://warisboring.com/the-russian-military-wants-students-to-design-its-new-underwater-drone/>

Post-Soviet Russia is no longer a status quo power centered on preserving Russia's place in the security order through static, *no change* policies and the static presence of forces in frozen conflicts. Russia today is a system change power. Putin's breakout strategy is designed to destabilize, and the approach seeks to unfreeze frozen conflicts, break rules, and foster tensions where useful to accelerate the melting away of Europe's proven security principles and rules.

Putin gains little for Russia's security today from these actions. It is a carefully developed policy and strategy. It is not a carefully balanced strategy. It shows scant regard for the instability created by this policy – that is the intent of the policy. It is a strategy designed to test wills and determine who will tire first and compromise on the principles of security. These actions set Russia, and consequently Europe with it, on a course to compete over Europe's future security arrangements.<sup>84</sup>

The challenge is both political and military, and responses need to be in both spheres. The political challenge is perhaps more difficult because it requires that the West accept the reality that Putin views it as an existential threat to his regime and his country. It also means that the West may have to respond to the Kremlin's efforts to use non-traditional military means to destabilize NATO and the EU with similar measures against Russia and its allies.

It is a mistake to view the current struggle between Russia and the Western allies primarily as a military competition. Certainly, in view of the Kremlin's willingness to use force to resolve political conflicts along its periphery, attention must be paid to NATO's ability to deter Moscow. But if Russia is denied the possibility of a quick, low-cost military campaign, then the competition will be decided on other battlefields. It is in these other domains that the U.S. and its allies have the advantage and are likely to prevail.

### Leveraging Western Economic Strength

The greatest disparity between Western strengths and Russian weaknesses is in the sphere of economics. Russia is desperately dependent on foreign purchases of its oil, gas and arms to sustain its national budget. Foreign technology, whether acquired legitimately or through a massive program of espionage, is also critical to the Russian military's modernization programs. In addition, Putin has committed his government to increasing investments in science and technology, industry, infrastructure, health care, education and the social safety net.

The Russian economy is already in a secular decline. This is causing cutbacks in spending on defense, delays in programs reaching production and in the quantities of advanced armaments being purchased. A weakening economy also puts the Kremlin under increasing domestic political pressure. As the economy shrinks, the ability of elites to extract rents will also decline.

A central aspect to any Western Competitive Strategy vis-à-vis Russia must be a concerted effort to impose economic costs on that country for its aggressive activities. Reducing the resources available to the regime for its military modernization program is one of the most powerful means to address the Russian threat to NATO. More broadly, decoupling the Russian economy, particularly its exports of oil and gas from that of Europe, can reduce Moscow's ability to influence political and security decision-making on the Continent.

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<sup>84</sup> Stephen R. Covington, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

Sanctions have already weakened the Russian economy. In 2017, the U.S. Senate passed a new Russia sanctions bill that directly targets key sectors of the Russian economy, as well as that country's dependence on external sources of financing and technology to maintain its tottering energy export infrastructure.<sup>85</sup> Without access to Western credits and technology, Russian energy exports, to Europe in particular, are bound to decline.<sup>86</sup>

While the current set of international sanctions have had an impact on the Russian economy, they are not adequate as a Competitive Strategy. Broader and more comprehensive sanctions need to be applied to the Russian economy. Finally, consideration needs to be given to providing alternative financing mechanisms for countries that eschew Russian investments.

It is important to consider additional economic measures that can be used either to deter Russian activities or diminish Moscow's capabilities to pursue its objectives. Further restrictions on Russia's access to capital markets, limits on the ability of oil and gas companies to import equipment and parts and expanded efforts to track and even limit outflows of capital from Russia could have a significant impact on the interests of the kleptocracy and the operation of the overall economy.

The absence of rule of law and a lack of property rights poses a particularly challenging problem for Russia's kleptocracy, in regards to securing their wealth. This necessitates offshoring substantial financial resources. By one estimate, over \$800 billion in Russian wealth is deposited overseas in a variety of financial and physical instruments.<sup>87</sup> A noted expert on the Russian economy, Anders Aslund, has pointed out that this makes the Russian leadership particularly vulnerable to targeted sanctions that would prevent Russian leaders and oligarchs from accessing their overseas accounts.<sup>88</sup>

The threat of sanctions by itself can constrain Russia's international trade. The U.S. State Department recently announced that it believed that the Congress' passage of new, broad sanctions legislation had resulted in a number of countries cancelling some \$3 billion in orders for Russian military equipment.<sup>89</sup>

The U.S. and its global allies need to consider new arrangements that limit Russian access to commercial and military advanced technologies. Pressure should be exerted on U.S. allies around the globe to restrict transfers of military and dual-use technologies to Russia. The U.S. government should explore the potential for a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the Cold War's Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls.<sup>90</sup>

In an interview with the *Huffington Post*, Sergey Aleksashenko, former deputy chairman of the Central Bank of Russia, described the impact of the combination of declining Western investments and intensifying sanctions on the Russian economy thusly:

The main, long-term result of the Western sanctions and the confrontation in international affairs for Russia will be the degradation of the economy. It's not a secret that Russia

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<sup>85</sup> <http://www.foxbusiness.com/features/senate-passes-bill-expanding-russia-sanctions-limiting-trumps-say>

<sup>86</sup> <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/eu-could-curb-capital-markets-as-part-of-new-russia-sanctions-43346>

<sup>87</sup> <http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/files/NPZ2017WIDworld.pdf>

<sup>88</sup> <http://thehill.com/opinion/finance/355798-putins-greatest-weakness-may-be-on-us-shores>

<sup>89</sup> <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/us-sanctions-stop-3-bln-in-russian-arms-deals-state-department-60582>

<sup>90</sup> "EU Could Curb Capital Markets as Part of New Russia Sanctions," *The Moscow Times*, January 29, 2015, <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/eu-could-curb-capital-markets-as-part-of-new-russia-sanctions-43346>.

needed a lot of Western equipment and Western capital to modernize its economy. Not just money, but technology, know-how, management skills. If the political risk of doing business in Russia remains high, that means foreign businesses will refrain from going to Russia. And that will keep Russian growth rates low, even if the country recovers from the recession. That's low for the emerging economies and that means the share of Russia in the global economy will shrink, and the technological gap between Russia and developed nations will increase.<sup>91</sup>

## Competing With Russia In The Global Energy Economy

The economic contest between Russia and the West will be played out primarily on the battlefield of energy supplies. The Russian economy's dependence on energy exports makes it a potentially central battlefield in the struggle to compete with Russia.

There are particular features of the Russian energy economy, such as the transportation routes for oil and natural gas, create points of vulnerability that the West can exploit. The revolution in shale oil production and the opportunity it presents to export liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Russian customers may be a key U.S. competitive advantage.

The Russian energy sector is increasingly non-competitive with that of countries with access to advanced technology. However, the future of the Russian energy industry hinges on several concerns. The first is pressures on the cost of oil and gas that undermine the competitiveness of the Russian oil sector. Soviet-era fields continue to mature, and production is declining at higher levels than the capital expenditure available to keep things at the current level past 2020.

The new fields being exploited are in remote areas, where the lack of existing infrastructure is adding to the financial burden, and severe climate conditions in many regions serve to further worsen the situation. Other than production and transportation costs, the invisible costs of rampant corruption and coping with regulatory and bureaucratic barriers also play a significant role.

The goal of a Competitive Strategy in energy is to reduce Europe's dependence on Russia as the sole or lowest price provider of oil and gas. In the short-term, the U.S. needs to forcefully oppose completion of the Gazprom's Nord Stream 2 pipeline project. This project will ensure Russia's dominant position in the European energy marketplace for decades to come.

By bypassing pipelines that pass through Ukraine, Nord Stream 2 would allow Russia to use restrictions on energy exports to Kiev as a club without impacting energy supplies to Germany and other parts of Western Europe. The European Commission opposes the pipeline because of its implications for European energy security.<sup>92</sup>

Ukraine's political independence is closely tied to its ability to diversify its sources of energy supply. Today, Ukraine is highly dependent on Russian natural gas for its heat and light. Russia uses this dependence as a weapon. Just recently, it announced a 40 percent increase in the price of natural gas to Ukraine. It has threatened to cut off the supply of gas to Ukraine unless it pays past bills in cash.

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<sup>91</sup> [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/sergey-aleksashenko-russia-economy-interview\\_us\\_56c62e7be4b0928f5a6b4586](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/sergey-aleksashenko-russia-economy-interview_us_56c62e7be4b0928f5a6b4586)

<sup>92</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/opinion/eu-need-not-fear-new-russian-gas-pipeline/>

Russia also has used its natural gas monopoly to destabilize Ukraine politically. Cheap natural gas undermines the domestic demand for Ukrainian coal mined in the eastern provinces. Workers in the coal mines do not stand in barricades; unemployed miners do. No wonder the eastern provinces of Ukraine are so unhappy with the government in Kiev, despite the fact the true architect of their misery resides in Moscow.

Europe's diversification of energy supplies will provide it with the ability to moderate high domestic energy prices while also building its resistance to Russian coercion. At the same time, it will allow Europe to place pressure on Russia for its political maneuvering on the Continent. Russia may wish to diversify its energy sales away from Europe but lacks the infrastructure and the resources to build an alternative energy distribution infrastructure to do so at present.<sup>93</sup>

Competing with Russia for the European natural gas market requires a long-term plan to create the infrastructure that would support significantly expanded sales from the U.S. to Europe. LNG terminals are being constructed along the U.S. Gulf Coast. An LNG terminal was recently opened in Lithuania. Others could be built in southeastern Europe, as well. Western governments should look to provide loan guarantees to support such construction efforts.

The Trump Administration might consider investments in energy export terminals as part of its plan for infrastructure investments. Providing loan guarantees for energy projects involving U.S. trade with Europe should be an administration concern. The Export-Import Bank and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation should make support for this type of energy project a priority.

Europe also can take steps to reduce its dependence on Russian energy supplies. Access to new sources of energy such as the major gas fields of the Eastern Mediterranean is one step. Another is to ensure the completion of the privately funded Southern Corridor project which will allow Caspian Sea energy to flow to Europe while bypassing Russian infrastructure.<sup>94</sup> Longer-term, the move to renewable energy also could reduce dependence on Russian energy supplies.

### [Exploiting Western Capabilities In The Information Domain](#)

Russia is a fragile political entity. This is the principal reason that the Kremlin views the West as an existential threat and why it seeks to undermine the legitimacy of Western institutions and political processes. The internet and, in particular, social media, are viewed as major sources of danger by Russian officials.

Moscow's hostile actions are driven by the belief that Russia is already in a state of conflict with the West, led by the United States, and that the internet is a domain for waging this conflict. From the earliest stages of the internet's development, Russia has held a starkly different view from the West of its benefits and its potential. Russia's national security establishment immediately saw connectivity as a threat and a potential weapon – and eventually as one that could help achieve regime change and deprive a country of its sovereignty – rather than as an enabler of economic development.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2014/NATO-Energy-security-running-on-empty/Ukrainian-conflict-Russia-annexation-of-Crimea/EN/index.htm>

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/NG-92.pdf>

<sup>95</sup> <https://www.cfr.org/report/countering-russian-information-operations-age-social-media>

Moscow should expect to be the target of such actions as it is employing in its efforts to discredit the legitimacy of Western institutions and to undermine the sovereignty of its adversaries, particularly the United States. Russian efforts to hack Western elections, plant fake news on a wide variety of websites, bribe foreign politicians and create faux political scandals is meant largely to weaken Western institutions. The Kremlin hopes that by attacking these institutions it can increase the credibility of the Putin regime as well as negatively influence the West's will to oppose Russian aggression.

A U.S./NATO strategy to counter Russian efforts to undermine the Alliance and the sovereignty of its members should be based on three sets of activities. First, additional steps must be taken to reverse perceptions of a lack of commitment on the part of NATO to the defense of its members and specifically to treating grey zone attacks as subject to an Alliance response.

Second, much more needs to be done to shore up nations in NATO/EU that were and remain politically and organizationally fragile. Ukraine is an example of how bad it can get. Third, there must be an intensified effort to apply the same tactics and concepts central to the new Russian strategy against Moscow.

NATO must demonstrate its resolve to ensure not merely the physical security but the independence and full sovereignty of all its members in face of the threat of political subversion. First, NATO needs to clearly and formally reject the Russian assertion of special rights and responsibilities for the wellbeing of the so-called near-abroad. Actions taken by Russia in the name of assisting ethnic Russians outside its borders should be treated as a violation of Article V of the NATO Treaty.

Second, if NATO lowers the bar with respect to its commitment to defend the sovereignty of Alliance members, then it must also possess the capabilities to affect the necessary response. Third, there must be an intensified effort to apply the same tactics and concepts central to the new Russian strategy against Moscow.

Despite persistent claims by Putin and the Russian leadership that their country has been under continuous attack by hybrid means for around a decade, it appears as if the Russian military has not taken any steps to develop defenses against such means. Recent articles by senior military strategists call for the Russian military to change its strategic planning and organization in order to address this threat.

According to one Russian theorist, "we still do not have any clarity as to what a hybrid war is and naturally there is no theory on this. And we do not have a strategy of countering it and how we can defend ourselves in the information field, the educational field, the scientific field, the military field and so forth."<sup>96</sup>

Such articles suggest that some of the tools and techniques associated with hybrid warfare may be applicable by the West against Russia as an element of deterrent or retaliatory strategies. At the least, feinting in the direction of implementing the kinds of political-military tactics and techniques associated with hybrid warfare may force the Russian military and security forces to

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<sup>96</sup> <https://jamestown.org/program/russian-military-expert-moscow-must-focus-defending-hybrid/>

divide their attention and resources away from offensive measures and towards the defense of Russia and its allies.

The Senate Armed Services Committee hearings on cyber threats highlighted the fact that the U.S. is at war on multiple fronts with Russia, China and several lesser powers.<sup>97</sup> This is not a war in the traditional sense. It involves continuous cyber intrusions into all aspects of American life: politics, economics, governance and military. Such attacks include the alleged Russian hack of the DNC and the Chinese penetration of the Office of Personnel Management. These intrusions involve a massive information warfare campaign, once called propaganda, against U.S. and allied policies and institutions.

One of the witnesses at the hearings, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, called out the Russian state-owned news network *RT*, which operates in the U.S., as a source of disinformation and propaganda. The goal, according to another witness, former Cyber Command/National Security Agency head Admiral Michael Rogers, may be to cause American citizens to lose confidence in the information they receive from government and private news sources. There have also been accusations that Russian intelligence agencies are funding political parties in Europe.

What is termed asymmetric, hybrid and grey zone conflict is classic politics and subversion by state or non-state actors on a competitive state that often was the prelude to war. Russia's current campaigns to undermine the U.S' and NATO's will to resist their activities in Eastern Europe are taken almost directly out of the Soviet playbook.

The Soviet Union sponsored all sorts of terrorist groups and proxies (e.g., Cuban forces in Africa). It also became involved in political campaigns in the West, such as the effort to prevent the deployment of Pershing II ballistic missiles and ground-launched cruise missiles in Europe. It was only after the Cold War ended that we discovered how deeply penetrated Western European political, administrative and security apparatuses were by Soviet and Eastern European intelligence services. It should come as no surprise that Moscow had been penetrating and subverting the Ukrainian government and military.

So, what is new in all this? Two things. First, we are not merely ill-equipped to fight hybrid wars and engage in grey zone conflicts; we lack a consensus on the nature of the fight, its goals and the rules of engagement. The communications revolution caused by the explosion of information technology (IT) has changed how both societies and military forces operate.

The "militarization" of the information space by states and non-state actors seeking advantage through the exploitation of social media, global communications, news networks and the like is possibly the most significant new feature of hybrid warfare. The U.S. government and military leaders have little experience with employing or exploiting the tools of the IT revolution as part of a strategic influence campaign.

The second change is one of attitude or mindset, ours more than that of our adversaries. The last time the U.S. was in a declared conventional conflict was more than sixty years ago. Every conflict since then has been limited in terms of this country's ends and means. Some have been

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<sup>97</sup> <http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2017/3/22/wanted-an-information-agency-on-steroids>

so-called wars of choice. This meant that the U.S. military was constrained with respect to both the means employed and the costs incurred. Not so for many of our adversaries.

The U.S. increasingly faces adversaries of a mindset that war is a death match. They are willing to use civilians as human shields, urban terrain as battle space, and young men and women as the precision targeting system for their weapons. When the military uses terms such as hybrid threat or hybrid strategy, they are referring to an adversary or group of enemies with old world attitudes towards combat and bloodletting, armed increasingly with new world technologies.

The U.S. faces conceptual, operational, organizational, legal and technical challenges dealing with hybrid/grey zone tactics, regardless of whether the adversary is Russia, China, regional actors or terrorist groups. First and foremost, there is no common agreed definition or understanding in the U.S. or among NATO countries of terms such as “hybrid warfare” or “grey zone.” Also, there is no consensus regarding the nature and magnitude of the hybrid warfare threat.

Second, the U.S. understanding of hybrid operations limits it to the period prior to conflict. Our leaders have not come to the realization that hybrid activities are themselves a form of warfare and will be conducted in all phases of a conflict.

Third, there is no common strategy or organizational construct for conduct of either defensive or offensive operations in a hybrid conflict or within the grey zone. For all the talk in U.S. defense plans about “whole of government” approaches to conflicts short of war, there is no agreement on what to do, how to do it or who should lead such efforts.

Fourth, there is a lack of adequate authorities and appropriately defined responsibilities to support U.S. hybrid operations. Finally, the U.S. military, security organizations and intelligence community lack the tools, trained operators and experience to successfully conduct defensive operations against hybrid actions.

The challenges posed by hybrid strategies, particularly as practiced by Russia, are both political and military. Responses need to be in both spheres. A Competitive Strategy requires offensive measures equal to or greater than what we do to defend networks, political institutions, critical infrastructure and information sources.

In February 2018, Admiral Rogers warned the Senate Armed Services Committee that a defense-only strategy would fail. The West must respond to the Kremlin’s efforts to use non-traditional means to destabilize the U.S. political system, NATO and the EU with similar measures against Russia and its allies.<sup>98</sup>

The West needs to invest in an array of public information assets for the purpose of countering Russian disinformation warfare and deception operations targeted at the nations of Europe. A number of European nations have legislation or regulations designed to ensure that information carried in the media is reliable and objective.

The penalties for knowingly providing false or misleading information should be made tougher and include not only fines but also suspension of licenses to operate. Beyond these policy

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<sup>98</sup> [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Rogers\\_02-27-18.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Rogers_02-27-18.pdf)

changes, efforts to combat corruption, improve effective and honest governance, build credible partnership capacity and integrate ethnic minorities need to be significantly increased.

Virtually all of the political measures that need to be implemented to counter Russian efforts to destabilize Europe and undermine its collective organizations are defensive in nature. What has received almost no attention is the potential to conduct an information campaign against Moscow and the Kremlin regime.

In 2015, the House Armed Services Committee sought to add \$30 million to the U.S. Special Operations Command budget to expand “global inform and influence activities” against Russia and terrorist groups like al Qaeda and ISIS. Much more than this is needed. Moreover, the money should go to an organization dedicated to countering hostile information operations.

Russia’s use of lawfare is a part of its strategic information campaign against the West.<sup>99</sup> The U.S. government and non-governmental organizations need to explore ways of conducting lawfare against Russia. Moscow is in flagrant violation of numerous international treaties and agreements, United Nations resolutions and legal norms. The U.S. and NATO nations could sue Russia in the International Court of Justice for its harassment of diplomats and representatives of international civil society organizations.

In a 2014 op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, two international lawyers argued for a concerted campaign to use the law to counter Russian hybrid operations.

As a start, the Obama administration should seek a U.N. General Assembly resolution requesting the International Court of Justice’s opinion on the legality of the Russian annexation of Crimea...

The U.S. and its allies should also challenge the legality of Russia’s actions in every conceivable legal venue, whether domestic or international.

Nongovernmental organizations, which cast themselves as guardians of the international order, have a role to play in condemning and challenging in courts of law and in public opinion Russia’s actions against Ukraine.<sup>100</sup>

The West should actively support efforts by countries such as Ukraine to take legal action against Russia in the International Court of Justice. NATO members may in some cases be better positioned to engage in a legal campaign to oppose Russian aggression than the United States. For example, members of the Alliance can take legal action to oppose Russian claims in the Arctic.

Using international law against the Kremlin is unlikely to cause a major change in Russian efforts to undermine Western legal norms. Nonetheless, it is important for the West to continually assert the primary rule of law and to hold the Russian government accountable for its misbehaviors. Legal suits and complaints lodged in international courts about Russian behavior should also be pursued as part of a comprehensive NATO information operations campaign.

Tying Russia up in various courts will drain it of time and resources that can no longer be used towards aggressive illegal expansion. Using lawfare requires little investment from

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<sup>99</sup> The definition of lawfare provided on p. 11

<sup>100</sup> <http://opiniojuris.org/2014/04/09/u-s-use-lawfare-russia/>

the U.S. and NATO but has high yields, since areas such as the Arctic are of low importance to us but would wreak havoc on Russia's plans. Some of the legal tactics employed against international terrorist groups and their state sponsors could be used against Russia.

There are possibilities to use the law as a weapon in a positive manner, affirmatively, i.e., in the form of so called "bankrupting terrorism" lawsuits (*cf.* Shurat HaDin Israel Law Center) using this term to refer to U.S.–Israeli terrorism litigation, referring to civil litigation before U.S. Federal Court which is directed against "funding" activities (e.g. direct payments to terrorist groups) and other forms of aiding and abetting (such as the provision of material support) qualifying as "indirect liability" for acts of Islamist terrorism and state sponsored terrorism, such as Russia's liability for shooting down MH17.<sup>101</sup>

One long-term Competitive Strategy in the sphere of information operations is a deliberate large-scale and persistent campaign to counter the Kremlin's domestic propaganda and disinformation, combined with the delivery of accurate information to Russia-speaking audiences. This would be part of a Competitive Strategy that would seek, at a minimum, to divert Russian resources from offensive information operations or, more importantly, change public opinion in Russia.

If we want to stop Russia from attacking our democracy and the democracies of Europe, we need an offensive strategy that provokes the Russian people into pressuring behavior modification of their own regime. The only way to do that is to provide the Russian people with factual and accurate information about what is happening inside Russia and what its leaders are doing. Even if the Russian people are not capable of forcing the Kremlin to change its foreign policy, they can press Putin to divert resources away from his efforts to subvert sovereign states to pacify domestic unrest.<sup>102</sup>

In January 2018, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee published a report on Putin's efforts to undermine democracy in Russia and Europe. Among its recommendations was a significant expansion of multilateral efforts to produce and support accurate, independent Russian-language media that can serve as an alternative to Kremlin propaganda. Going even further, Director James Clapper declared that "we could do with having a U.S. information agency on steroids to fight this information war [with Russia] a lot more aggressively than we're doing right now."<sup>103</sup>

Some observers have suggested mobilizing social media and using information about individuals' attitudes and beliefs available from such sources to conduct a long-term influence campaign in Russia. A 2017 study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies on recalibrating U.S. strategy for dealing with Russia observed that:

A modern way forward must leverage popular and emerging information technologies, including social media. The United States should learn from the experience of the corporate world and other countries to develop methods and mechanisms that can effectively target messages to audiences and ensure that those messages reach their destinations. Private sector messages and counter-propaganda efforts, especially

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<sup>101</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312072465\\_Lawfare\\_in\\_Hybrid\\_Wars\\_The\\_21st\\_Century\\_Warfare](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312072465_Lawfare_in_Hybrid_Wars_The_21st_Century_Warfare)

<sup>102</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/11/21/is-the-u-s-serious-about-counterering-russias-information-war-on-democracies/>

<sup>103</sup> <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/jan/5/james-clapper-calls-us-information-agency-steroids/>

independent media and respected civil society organizations, will be more important than ever.<sup>104</sup>

Controlling the flow of Russian propaganda is another potential Competitive Strategy. As the U.S. and its allies develop the means to defend against Russian information operations and electronic warfare attacks, it will also have capabilities for countering transmission of false information. A recent RAND Corporation study, *The Russian “Firehose of Falsehood” Propaganda Model*, observed that the U.S. could do the following:

Use various technical means to turn off (or turn down) the flow. If the firehose of falsehood is being employed as part of active hostilities, or if counterpropaganda efforts escalate to include the use of a wider range of information warfare capabilities, then jamming, corrupting, degrading, destroying, usurping, or otherwise interfering with the ability of the propagandists to broadcast and disseminate their messages could diminish the impact of their efforts. Anything from aggressive enforcement of terms of service agreements with internet providers and social media services to electronic warfare or cyberspace operations could lower the volume – and the impact – of Russian propaganda.<sup>105</sup>

Over at least the past decade, the U.S. and several of its key allies have developed sophisticated means for countering the threat posed by unconventional forces operating in the midst of civilian populations while receiving significant external support. Going after future complex hybrid threats will require more nuanced and agile approaches to build and maintain unparalleled capabilities to countering and directing our networks. The networks we are currently fighting consist of much more than just a few charismatic leaders and their gun- or bomb-toting foot soldiers. They also consist of planners, bomb makers, financiers, logistics and transportation specialists.

Beyond those individuals that could be called “officially” part of the extremist organization are a host of individuals and organizations that present themselves as legitimate and peaceful. In fact, many of these may be unwitting contributors to the extremist network. Even further back, hiding in the shadows are hostile, indifferent or incapable governments providing sanctuary, support or even direction.

In a decade of conflict in the Middle East, the U.S. has learned how to create and employ sophisticated networks precisely for the purpose of countering those of our adversaries. The Joint Improvised Threat Defeat Organization provided an example of how a network can be created, one that includes the whole of government, our allies and the private sector, to go after all elements of the terrorist system from devices all the way back to the financiers.

The experience of U.S. and Coalition Special Operation Forces to target terrorists, insurgents and agitators has been well demonstrated. What is not as well recognized is the experience gained in creating and operating all-source intelligence collection cells using state of the art tools to attack the network. These capabilities could be brought to bear on the problem of detecting, tracking

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<sup>104</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/recalibrating-us-strategy-toward-russia>

<sup>105</sup> <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html>

and characterizing Russian intelligence and operations networks and countering “little green men.”

NATO and the EU need to invest in an array of public information assets for the purpose of countering Russian disinformation warfare and deception operations targeted at European nations. There have been some efforts in this regard with respect to cyber threats. NATO and the EU need to set up information cells to track Russian disinformation campaigns. These cells should also possess a quick reaction capability to rapidly counter Russian disinformation and propaganda.

### **Strengthening The Anti-Putin Coalition Of States**

A struggle is underway for the soul of Europe. It is Vladimir Putin’s goal to create a new Russian empire, one that not only encompasses the former Soviet republics but is dominant in Europe. To achieve this end, Moscow is willing to engage in a new kind of war against the West. Dr. Stephen Blank describes the geostrategic nature of this war as follows:

To grasp the nature of this war and respond accordingly we must also understand Moscow’s objectives. Obviously, the primary objective is to secure the regime from the unceasing attack it believes is inherent in Western and especially American policy, namely preventing Russia from assuming its supposedly foreordained position as a great (imperial) power and dominating what it now calls Eurasia (the former Soviet territory). But this objective goes deeper than mainly a demand for restoration of hegemony over the former Soviet Union.

We should be clear that for Russia, the demand for respect and great power status means empire or some kind of contemporary analogue to it. This could include territorial revisions of European frontiers as in Ukraine and Georgia, not just an augmentation of Russian power in its borderlands, although that latter goal is certainly a critical one.<sup>106</sup>

A central element of any Competitive Strategy to counter Russian aggression against NATO must be to strengthen and even expand the alliance of free nations. In the face of growing Russian political and military threats to Europe, once non-aligned nations have begun to move closer to NATO. Military cooperation between the Alliance and Sweden has markedly increased over the past few years.<sup>107</sup> The Finnish foreign ministry commissioned a study in 2016 to assess the effects of Finland’s entry into NATO.<sup>108</sup> A new round of NATO expansion, one focused on outlier states such as Sweden and Finland, should be considered.

This would markedly change the strategic situation both in the Baltic region and the Arctic in favor of the Alliance. NATO would gain access to additional military facilities, the support of the excellent Swedish and Finnish militaries and an expanded strategic battlespace on its northern flank.

There are additional potential mechanisms for solidifying Western opposition to Russia. A senior NATO official recently proposed that the Alliance commit to the defense of Sweden and Finland

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<sup>106</sup> Blank, Lexington Institute paper

<sup>107</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/under-threat-sweden-rediscovers-its-viking-spirit-nato-russia/>

<sup>108</sup> <https://www.frstrategie.org/web/documents/publications/autres/2016/2016-heisbourg-mfa-finland-nato.pdf>

even if those states remain outside the formal organization.<sup>109</sup> This idea raises a fundamental strategic question: could NATO stand aside if Russia were to attack either Sweden or Finland?

Related to this objective, the U.S. and like-minded nations should develop a long-term strategy to enhance the political, economic and social stability of nations along Russia's periphery. The West needs to do more to help these states in their efforts to create a robust political culture, institutionalize the rule of law with an independent judiciary, maintain a free press and root out corruption. This would make them less susceptible to Russian information operations and political aggression. In response, Moscow would be forced to expend more energy and resources in an attempt to secure portions of its periphery.

U.S. and NATO strategy with respect to Ukraine is a particularly important strand in a Competitive Strategy to counter Russian aggression in Europe. President Putin's focus on destabilizing Ukraine reflects the importance of that country's status to the Kremlin's plans for asserting itself in Eastern Europe. In the short-term, U.S. goals must be to prevent Russia from turning Ukraine into a failed state and to simultaneously ensure that Moscow pays a significant and even increasing cost for its intervention.

In the long-term, the goal of the West's strategy should be to support a Ukraine that is free, democratic and prosperous. A Ukraine that is aligned with the West, even if not a member of NATO or the EU, would be an important political and security partner. It would also challenge the Kremlin's efforts to wall Russia off from democratic values and free market behaviors.

### **Countering Russia's Improved Conventional Capabilities**

The immediate military challenge for NATO is to address the numerous capability gaps that exist vis-à-vis Russia. A Competitive Strategy to respond to the Russian military threat to Europe should pursue three broader, longer-term goals. The first of these is to deny Moscow its preferred option, a rapid "smash and grab" conventional assault on a neighbor. The Russian military is ill-prepared and under-manned for a protracted conflict.

The second goal is to negate Russia's investment in its integrated air defense system. This will undermine Moscow's confidence in its ability to conduct offensive military operations and pose a threat to high-value targets in the Russian homeland. The third goal is to pose a sufficient threat along Russia's periphery in regions such as the Arctic and Far East, so as to force Moscow to shift resources way from Europe.

Just a few years ago, Western military leaders were all but certain that the era of the tank was over. As a result, they unwisely did away with the world's foremost armored fighting force. Germany, the nation that more than any other perfected the role of tanks and armored formations in warfare, reduced its fleet of Leopard tanks from some 2,100 to 225.<sup>110</sup> The British Army, which ended the Cold War with 800 advanced tanks, currently deploys just 156 in a single regiment. France has 406 tanks but only 240 in front line units. In comparison, the Ukrainian

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<sup>109</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-russia/nato-should-defend-sweden-finland-if-attacked-nato-official-idUSKBN1DT30V>

<sup>110</sup> <https://www.defensenews.com/land/2015/04/18/germany-to-buy-back-tanks-amid-russia-threat/>

separatists in Luhansk and Donetsk were reportedly operating more than 700 tanks, a larger fleet than that of that of Britain, German and France combined.<sup>111</sup>

Moreover, reductions in combat support capabilities, logistics and manpower means that this “corporal’s guard” of NATO armored fighting units are actually less capable and deployable than raw numbers would indicate. A recent RAND study concluded that it would take a month or more for the United Kingdom, Germany and France to generate a combat ready armored brigade.<sup>112</sup>

The U.S. Army is in a somewhat better position than its NATO allies when it comes to both the size of its tank park – approximately 6,000 Abrams main battle tanks – and the number of available fully formed Armored Brigade Combat Teams (ABCTs) each of which consists of Abrams, Bradley Fighting Vehicles and Paladin Self Propelled artillery plus supporting vehicles. However, the Army is so short of heavy armor formations that it is converting one of its infantry brigades into an ABCT.

However, almost all U.S. Army ABCTs are based in the continental United States, thousands of miles away from Europe. The only two formations based in Europe are the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment, equipped with Stryker Infantry Fighting Vehicles, and the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade Combat Team. The U.S. Army is working on ways to maximize its presence in Europe without recreating massive fixed infrastructure.

The Russian Army, which inherited most of the Soviet Union’s massive arsenal of over 50,000 tanks, has slimmed itself down to around 2,800 modern main battle tanks in active units plus another 12,000 in reserve.<sup>113</sup> Most of these are positioned facing NATO in western Russia.

Moreover, the Russian Army has reaffirmed its commitment to the tank and to heavy armored fighting forces with the recreation of the multi-division 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Tank Army (1<sup>st</sup> GTA), an offensive unit once stationed in East Germany opposite U.S. forces on the Fulda Gap. The 1<sup>st</sup> GTA consists of some 500 to 600 tanks, 600 to 800 infantry fighting vehicles and 300 to 400 artillery pieces.<sup>114</sup>

The Russian Army has also stood up three additional combined arms divisions in the West, drawing men and weapons from units stationed farther east. One long-time observer of Russian military developments concludes that these force developments reflect a military doctrine that emphasizes “preemption, escalation dominance, surprise (suddenness and deception), shock, strike power, and speed of action [which] are classic features of Russian military operations... The entirety of the armed forces and its supporting military system are poised for quick, early action in a crisis, conflict, or war to preempt their opponent’s ability to surprise them.”<sup>115</sup>

In order to deter Russia from attempting to use its large and well-equipped ground forces either to intimidate its neighbors to the West or to conduct a lightning war against the Baltics, Poland, Ukraine or Romania, NATO must have a strong conventional capability deployed in Eastern

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<sup>11111</sup> <http://euromaidanpress.com/2015/05/26/separatists-in-donbas-have-more-tanks-than-germany-france-and-czech-republic-combined/#arvlbdata>

<sup>112</sup> [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1600/RR1629/RAND\\_RR1629.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1600/RR1629/RAND_RR1629.pdf)

<sup>113</sup> [http://www.janes360.com/images/assets/643/58643/Return\\_of\\_the\\_bear\\_Russian\\_Ground\\_Forces\\_modernisation.pdf](http://www.janes360.com/images/assets/643/58643/Return_of_the_bear_Russian_Ground_Forces_modernisation.pdf)

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.businessinsider.com/this-is-the-russian-tank-corps-putin-is-sending-natos-borders-2017-8>

<sup>115</sup> <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/03/assessing-russia-s-reorganized-and-rearmed-military-pub-69853>

Europe. The decision to send U.S. ABCTs to Europe on heel-to-toe rotations is a good start; for the first time, two ABCTs are being simultaneously rotated into Poland.<sup>116</sup>

One advantage to rotational deployments vice permanent forward stationing is the ability to employ these units continuously in presence and training missions. Another is the avoidance of the inevitable installation and transportation costs involved with creating permanent facilities to house soldiers and their families.

In addition to increasing the quantity of NATO armored formations confronting Russian forces, it is also important to improve their fighting ability. The U.S. has programs in place to upgrade the effectiveness and lethality of its major ground combat systems: the Abrams, Bradley and Paladin.<sup>117</sup> The obsolescent M113 personnel carrier is being replaced by the Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicle. A Stryker Lethality program is underway with the first of some 83 vehicles equipped with a 30mm gun arriving in Europe. Experiments are underway to identify active protection systems for these vehicles.

The U.S. and its NATO allies face a series of immediate capability gaps which they are attempting to address. These include the return of U.S. ABCTs and associated divisional and corps assets to Europe. In addition to increasing the overall capacity of U.S. ground forces in Europe, the U.S. Army must also take steps to improve their capabilities through selective modernization.

The U.S. Army has identified a number of critical capability gaps which it is endeavoring to address. These include air and missile defense, long-range fires, munitions, jam resistant position, navigation and timing, electronic warfare, cyber, assured communications and active protection for armored fighting vehicles.<sup>118</sup>

Many of the proposed solutions to the U.S. Army's modernization priorities would address the goal of denying Russia a rapid conventional offensive option against NATO. Ground-based fires will have a larger role to play in future high-end conflicts. The Army is pursuing a three-pronged modernization program: increase both the range and volume of artillery fires, deploy a long-range precision fires capability and develop a ballistic missile with a minimum range of 499 kilometers.<sup>119</sup> Such capabilities could be employed against Russian air defense sites, logistics choke points, C2 targets, airfields and vehicle concentrations.

While many commentaries on NATO military responses to the threat of Russian aggression against Europe have focused on the need for ground force deployments in the East, there are other investments that are equally important and deserve priority.

First among these is improved ISR and targeting capabilities. It makes little sense to increase the range of U.S. and NATO fire systems without ensuring the availability of long-range precision

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<sup>116</sup> <http://www.newsweek.com/us-army-sends-two-tank-brigades-europe-amid-russia-tensions-664258?amp=1>

<sup>117</sup> <http://scout.com/military/warrior/Article/The-Armys-More-Lethal-M1A2-SEP-v4-Abrams-Tank-Variant-Will-Start-101457471>

<sup>118</sup> <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/17-03-22-army-modernization>

<sup>119</sup> [https://breakingdefense.com/2018/03/army-will-field-100-km-cannon-500-km-missiles-lrpf-cft/?utm\\_campaign=Breaking%20Defense%20Land&utm\\_source=hs\\_email&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=61662068&\\_hsenc=p2ANqtz--O3FExvkCo-k-anvx6zbMPYGPpk5cY0UAgDRnczu86LqXrE0p3JFCdh7q2l7j9r7DPviJT1EDMTzcBSVWUt7KyL-u4gQ&\\_hsmi=61662068](https://breakingdefense.com/2018/03/army-will-field-100-km-cannon-500-km-missiles-lrpf-cft/?utm_campaign=Breaking%20Defense%20Land&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=61662068&_hsenc=p2ANqtz--O3FExvkCo-k-anvx6zbMPYGPpk5cY0UAgDRnczu86LqXrE0p3JFCdh7q2l7j9r7DPviJT1EDMTzcBSVWUt7KyL-u4gQ&_hsmi=61662068)

ISR and targeting. The Army has recognized the need for mobile tactical ISR platforms, both manned and unmanned, in order to support agile maneuvers and long-range precision fires.<sup>120</sup>

NATO should consider developing a strategy for urban defense. Denying Russian forces the ability to rapidly overrun high-value urban centers and to consolidate their occupation of territory would complicate Moscow's strategic planning and even deter aggression. Russian Ground Forces lack sufficient manpower and firepower to sustain a serious urban assault. Moreover, by forcing Russia into a protracted conflict situation, NATO can make greater use of its air and missile capabilities to attack forward deployed ground and air forces and their supporting logistics network.

One of the most important investments NATO needs to make is in logistics and infrastructure. NATO requires a robust, hardened, dispersed and defended air power infrastructure in Eastern Europe. This is a particularly important goal in light of the investments Russia has made in long-range strike capabilities intended to suppress NATO infrastructure. In addition, NATO needs to invest in transportation infrastructure and in sustainment capacity to rapidly move heavy forces from Western and Central Europe to the likely battle zones in the East and to enable those forces to operate once deployed.

NATO needs to invest heavily in a layered air and missile defense systems. It is clear that Moscow has significant concerns about the proliferation of NATO defenses, particularly advanced anti-missile capabilities. A layered defense will inject uncertainty into a Russian offensive strategy that relies heavily on an initial massed attack by manned aircraft and cruise and ballistic missiles to destroy critical NATO targets and set the conditions for a rapid conventional victory.

The current U.S. sponsored European Phased Adaptive Approach that intends to defend against missiles launched from the Middle East will have two primary sites, one in Romania and a second in Poland.<sup>121</sup> The Alliance needs to consider deploying robust land- and sea-based theater missile defense capabilities focused primarily on countering an initial Russian missile salvo.

NATO's air power will be one of the most significant factors in deterring Russian aggression and countering the conventional military elements of its evolving strategy. The Russian military has expended enormous resources in pursuit of a counter to NATO air power. Air power is the most flexible military instrument available to the Alliance. It will be critical to the destruction of the anti-access/area denial enclaves Russia has built in Kaliningrad and elsewhere.

The first step to restore NATO's erstwhile air dominance is to protect and extend the Alliance's network of air bases and supporting infrastructure. NATO needs survivable airfields in order to have the resources to prosecute Russian air defense assets.

For U.S. air power to be effective against Russian air defense networks elsewhere in the world, its base infrastructure needs to be survivable through a combination of dispersion, hardening and defenses. It also needs an integrated air defense system that combines

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<sup>120</sup> [https://breakingdefense.com/2018/03/army-really-wants-armed-recon-aircraft-again-vcsa-cft-chief/?utm\\_source=hs\\_email&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=61686125&\\_hsenc=p2ANqtz--w3yjr-9iFm3JexaFTEd2bDMKFvn39BzOj3ZwFydgqOxLXgZCwhqIN7gKyYcmXcjc1\\_FjZOjNtkAAAtAEbmPrbUnw7GUw&\\_hsmi=61686125](https://breakingdefense.com/2018/03/army-really-wants-armed-recon-aircraft-again-vcsa-cft-chief/?utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=61686125&_hsenc=p2ANqtz--w3yjr-9iFm3JexaFTEd2bDMKFvn39BzOj3ZwFydgqOxLXgZCwhqIN7gKyYcmXcjc1_FjZOjNtkAAAtAEbmPrbUnw7GUw&_hsmi=61686125)

<sup>121</sup> [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR957.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR957.html)

long-range surveillance with effective surface-to-air missile defenses. Achieving significant results against ground targets requires large-scale reinforcement with strike aircraft supported by escorting fighters and electronic countermeasure aircraft, and a close integration with long-range, ground-based artillery capable of suppressing enemy air defenses with area fires.<sup>122</sup>

The U.S. and its allies need to deploy a new generation of systems focused on the suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) mission. According to the U.S. Air Force's *Air Superiority 2030 Flight Plan*, what is required is a combination of high volume stand-off air-to-surface missile platforms – an arsenal plane, stealthy penetrating bombers, a penetrating counter air fighter and an array of unmanned aerial systems.<sup>123</sup> These platforms will be armed with a combination of long and short-range, stealthy air-to-surface missiles, high-speed anti-radiation homing weapons, drones armed with kinetic warheads and jammers and low-cost aerial decoys.

The proliferation of fifth generation stealth fighters across NATO is likely to have a significant impact on the ability of the Alliance to engage in SEAD missions, as well as pursue high value targets. According to NATO's Joint Air Power Competence Centre, the F-35 will be the backbone for next generation NATO operations.<sup>124</sup> The Joint Strike Fighter will allow the Alliance to go deep into a double-digit air defense environment to destroy moving and mobile targets while outnumbered by sophisticated fighters equipped with advanced air-to-air weapons. In addition,

With its impressive sensor suite, net centric design, and ability to carry more than 18,000 pounds of payload when loaded externally, the F-35 can be thought of as a 5th generation Strike Eagle: the advanced avionics of an F-22 combined with the range payload that nearly matches that of an F-15E. This allows the F-35 to shape a crisis throughout the conflict, beginning with the removal of the enemy IADS and continuing until the final day of sorties.

The U.S. and NATO should exploit their advantage in naval forces to counter Russian investments in anti-access/area denial capabilities. As part of its distributed lethality program, the U.S. Navy is proliferating long-range strike systems on its surface platforms and netting together airborne, surface and subsurface sensors. It also plans to add to the capability of its Virginia-class nuclear-powered attack submarine with the Virginia Payload Module, which will expand the potential loadout of cruise missiles as well as allow the deployment of large conventionally-armed ballistic missiles.

As part of a long-term Competitive Strategy, it may be possible to establish dominance or overmatch in electronic warfare (EW). Perhaps it is true, to paraphrase former U.S. Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson, that gentlemen do not jam each other's communications. But the Russians do. Russian operations against Georgia, Crimea and Eastern Ukraine have shown a sophisticated ability to manipulate and jam private, government and military communications and weapon systems that depend on navigation signals to reach their target. Former Commander,

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<sup>122</sup> <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1038987.pdf>

<sup>123</sup> <http://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/airpower/Air%20Superiority%202030%20Flight%20Plan.pdf>

<sup>124</sup> <https://www.japcc.org/f-35-the-backbone-of-next-generation-nato-operations/>

U.S. Army Europe, Lieutenant General Ben Hodges described the Russian EW capabilities as “really effective.”<sup>125</sup>

NATO’s EW challenge is not simply technological. Essentially, Western armies got out of the EW game at the end of the Cold War. They returned to the subject, if at all, only insofar as this was part of the effort to counter radio-triggered improvised explosive devices used by terrorists. There is a lack of systems, personnel and concepts of operations to adequately conduct modern EW. This situation must be corrected.

Current U.S. defense department and NATO efforts to address the EW challenge could help to stabilize the imbalance with Russia in this area. The U.S. Army is seeking to rapidly deploy an interim ground-based EW system. The Army’s Rapid Capabilities Office has been accelerating the deployment of EW systems to units in Europe.<sup>126</sup> The U.S. Navy is developing the next generation jammer to be deployed in the EA-18G Growlers.<sup>127</sup>

A related area for consideration is the competition in space. As one U.S. official recently admitted, we are in an era of space warfare.<sup>128</sup> The Russian military plans call for offensive space operations even before the outset of formal hostilities. Electronic and cyber weapons will be employed to degrade Western space assets. Once hostilities have begun, Russian forces will target both assets in space and ground control stations.<sup>129</sup>

However, Russia is increasingly reliant on space-based assets for operational and strategic communications, command and control systems, ISR and targeting of long-range precision strike weapons and the coordination of combined forces. At the same time, its space industry, both the launch and satellite elements, are suffering from chronic weaknesses and even secular decline.<sup>130</sup>

In this sphere, a Competitive Strategy would include efforts to ensure reliable access to space in the face of anti-satellite threats, secure space-related networks against jamming and cyberattacks and the ability to threaten Russian space assets. The U.S. Army’s Space and Missile Command is testing a microsatellite in Low Earth orbit, capable of providing quality electro-optical images directly to ground force commanders.<sup>131</sup>

The U.S. needs to accelerate the development and deployment of microsatellites that would be difficult to target by anti-satellite weapons and can be replenished relatively rapidly. The combination of the development of operational responsive launch capabilities and microsatellites

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<sup>125</sup> <https://www.defensenews.com/video/2017/10/10/hodges-russian-electronic-warfare-capability-really-effective/>

<sup>126</sup> [https://www.army.mil/article/200175/us\\_armys\\_new\\_electronic\\_warfare\\_capabilities\\_hit\\_the\\_ground\\_in\\_europe](https://www.army.mil/article/200175/us_armys_new_electronic_warfare_capabilities_hit_the_ground_in_europe)

<sup>127</sup> <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/the-navy-has-plan-make-sure-its-carriers-can-crush-russia-21072>

<sup>128</sup> <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/04/06/outer-space-war-defense-russia-china-463067>

<sup>129</sup> <http://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/Russia%20Military%20Power%20Report%202017.pdf>

<sup>130</sup> <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/falling-earth-russias-space-industry-dying-12911>;

<http://spacenews.com/russia-looks-past-soyuz-2-failure-to-soyuz-5/>; <https://spaceflightnow.com/2017/11/28/russian-weather-satellite-and-18-secondary-payloads-feared-lost/>; <https://spaceflightnow.com/2017/11/28/russian-weather-satellite-and-18-secondary-payloads-feared-lost/>

<sup>131</sup> <https://www.defensenews.com/smr/space-missile-defense/2017/08/14/army-microsatellite-heads-to-space-to-aid-warfighters-on-the-ground/>; <http://spacenews.com/army-space-project-a-now-or-never-moment-for-low-cost-military-satellites/>

would transform access to space and negate much of the Russian effort to dominate this region.<sup>132</sup>

The U.S. has not responded to current Russian and Chinese anti-satellite programs with one of its own. This reflects a largely misguided view that the U.S. is more reliant on space-based assets and that, as a consequence, it is more important to avoid war in space rather than to win one.

The U.S. needs to begin a program to build and deploy sets of anti-satellite weapons. These systems should be designed primarily to defend U.S. and allied space assets from Russia's and other countries' anti-satellite weapons. However, there also needs to be a capability to directly threaten critical Russian space assets that would be instrumental in any military operations against the U.S. or NATO.

A long-term Competitive Strategy for NATO must include a serious effort to gain dominance in the electromagnetic battlespace.<sup>133</sup> The U.S. and its allies should explore investments in a range of EW systems and even munitions that can degrade Russian air defense radars and other targeting sensors, jam their communications, command and control systems and complicate the delivery of precision munitions.<sup>134</sup>

Attention is finally being devoted by both the U.S. and NATO to the challenge of cyber warfare. What may be particularly important about this awareness is the recognition that Russia has developed capabilities to conduct cyber operations across the conflict spectrum and for political and economic purposes as well as to support military operations. The problem of countering Russian cyber activities may be less in the creation of offsetting tools or "weapons" and more in improvement in cyber intelligence, organization, coordination and authorities.

There are still important questions that must be addressed by the Alliance, such as: How should a CS approach deal with cyber threats? Is it an area of enduring advantage for one side or the other? Could the U.S. and NATO establish overmatch in this area? Are there areas of Alliance strength or advantage that could be counter-positioned to a Russian cyber threat in a way to diminish the latter's utility or effectiveness to Moscow, particularly in situations short of war?

Governmental and public attention has been focused almost exclusively on Russia's capabilities to conduct offensive cyber operations and the West's vulnerabilities to such intrusions. The U.S. and NATO are emphasizing cyber defense activities, the creation of national cyber defense capabilities and improving the ability of law enforcement entities to deal with cyber intrusions that are a key element of Russia's strategy for hybrid warfare.<sup>135</sup>

What is less clear is the state of Western strengths in this area and the vulnerability of Russia's networks and computer systems to intrusion. Until recently, the U.S. and its allies have chosen to

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<sup>132</sup> <http://www.defenseone.com/business/2017/11/us-air-force-turns-its-focus-space-small-team-could-lead-way/142656/>

<sup>133</sup> <https://www.icds.ee/publications/article/russias-electronic-warfare-capabilities-to-2025-challenging-nato-in-the-electromagnetic-spectrum/>

<sup>134</sup> [http://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA6305\\_%28EMS2\\_Report%29Final7-web.pdf](http://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA6305_%28EMS2_Report%29Final7-web.pdf)

<sup>135</sup> <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2016/Also-in-2016/cyber-defense-nato-security-role/EN/index.htm>

respond to Russian cyber intrusions by other means, particularly sanctions. At the 2016 Warsaw Summit, NATO accepted the need for a capability to conduct cyber offensive operations.<sup>136</sup>

Russian networks and computer systems may be more vulnerable to cyber intrusions than has heretofore been recognized by the West or, for obvious reasons, acknowledged by Russian authorities. Recent massive, global cyber events such the WannaCry ransomware attack hit the Russian system particularly hard. A variety of sources familiar with Russian cyber security capabilities support the idea that Russian networks are extremely vulnerable to attack.<sup>137</sup>

The U.S. and its NATO allies need to plan and prepare for the conduct of offensive cyber operations against Russia in the grey zone area prior to formal hostilities. Such actions, undertaken in peacetime, can serve not only to deter Russian cyber threats but also the potential that Moscow might escalate to more kinetic attack options.

The U.S. and other countries are already taking initial steps in this direction. Internet service providers and social media sites are being pressured to take down accounts tied to Russian hackers or agents of influence. More aggressive measures are certainly doable. NATO should prepare to conduct a “counterbattery fires” campaign against Russian hackers and internet trolls.

If subtle measures prove insufficient, the United States should be ready to take more offensive action. In situations where the defense of the nation is on the line, U.S. hackers could pursue a campaign of erasing computers at scale, disabling accounts and credentials used by hackers to attack, and cutting off access to services so it is harder to compromise innocent systems to conduct their attacks. Such a campaign would aim to make every aspect of hacking much harder: because hackers often reuse computers, accounts, and infrastructure, targeting these would sabotage their capabilities or render them otherwise useless.<sup>138</sup>

The West is confronted by massive government-backed attacks on private sector entities. While individuals and corporations have a responsibility to provide reasonable cyber defense, they are not in the business of cyber offense. U.S. law prohibits corporations from conducting offensive cyber operations in response to an intrusion. They are not even allowed to penetrate foreign computer systems in order to gather intelligence or recover lost data. The governments representing these companies have a right, and some would argue a duty, to defend their citizens from such attacks.<sup>139</sup>

## **Neutralizing The Coercive Potential Of Russian Nuclear Forces**

While the Russian military plans for the possible use of nuclear weapons in a conflict with NATO, this does not mean that Russian leaders would welcome such a scenario. In addition to serving as the primary deterrent of a nuclear attack on the homeland, Moscow views nuclear weapons as a counter to the West’s advantages in long-range conventional strike capabilities and a key tool in its strategy for hybrid warfare. This expansive view of the role of nuclear weapons

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<sup>136</sup> <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/07/natos-little-noticed-but-important-new-aggressive-stance-on-cyber-weapons/>

<sup>137</sup> <http://money.cnn.com/2017/05/15/technology/russia-vulnerable-cyberattack/index.html>

<sup>138</sup> <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-03-22/how-us-can-play-cyber-offense>

<sup>139</sup> <https://www.cyberscoop.com/corporate-cybersecurity-hacking-back-hearing/>

in conflict with NATO suggests that the classic notions of red lines and rungs on the escalation ladder may be disappearing.

As Dr. Stephen Blank observes: “arguably there is a seamless web leading from conventional scenarios up to and including these supposedly limited nuclear war scenarios, perhaps using tactical nuclear weapons for which the West as of yet has found no response.”<sup>140</sup> Another expert in Russian nuclear strategy makes the following point:

In this way, the content of the concept of traditional strategic deterrence is broadened to cover both Russian nuclear and conventional assets. On the other hand, the abolishment of the restrictions for the use of nuclear weapons means that the dividing line between waging war with conventional or with nuclear weapons is vanishing.

When the principle of surprise is connected to this idea, it seems that Russia wants to indicate that non-strategic nuclear weapons could be regarded as “normal” assets on a conventional battlefield. This is the basis upon which Russia regulates the level of deterrence, for example in the Kaliningrad exclave. By introducing the concept of pre-emptive strike to its military means, Russia is trying to enhance its non-nuclear deterrence even further.<sup>141</sup>

NATO and the U.S. must accept as an absolute priority the need to recreate a solid, credible and capable escalation ladder with which clearly delineated and identifiable capabilities are available for each rung. The U.S. has announced plans to modernize all the legs of its nuclear triad. The U.S. also has a program underway to modernize its only tactical nuclear weapon, the B61 gravity bomb.

The Trump Administration’s recently released Nuclear Posture Review announced that the U.S. would deploy nuclear-capable F-35s to NATO, acquire a small number of low-yield weapons for deployment on submarine launched ballistic missiles and develop a new nuclear-armed submarine-launched cruise missile.<sup>142</sup>

A long-term Competitive Strategy for NATO must seek to devalue nuclear weapons as a central element of Russia’s strategy to intimidate and coerce the Alliance. The credibility and capability of the NATO nuclear deterrent must be unassailable. Perhaps more important must be the Alliance’s determination to resist any of Moscow’s attempts to achieve its political objectives by means of nuclear threats.

The top NATO priority should be to deter a nuclear crisis involving Russia. NATO’s new approach should be built on the premise that a renewed understanding and faith in Allied deterrence capabilities, including, critically, the willingness to use them, is a prerequisite to any successful arms control. The only way to convince Russia to decrease its reliance

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<sup>140</sup> Blank, op. cit.

<sup>141</sup> Lt. Col Pertti Forsstrom (Finland), “Russian Military Interests In the Baltic Region In the Light Of the Crimean Operation and the Development of Russian Threat Perceptions In the Military Sphere,” Paper Presented to the Conference, “The Russian Military in Comparative Perspective,” Washington, D.C., May 9-10, Forthcoming in Stephen J. Blank, Ed., *The Russian Military In Contemporary Perspective*, Carlisle Barracks ,PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2018

<sup>142</sup> <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872877/-1/-1/1/EXECUTIVE-SUMMARY.PDF>

on nuclear weapons seems to be to deny Russia any advantage from the nuclearisation of its security policy.<sup>143</sup>

NATO needs to have a substantive and public debate over the requirements for nuclear deterrence in the 21st century. For nearly two decades, the Alliance sought to continually reduce the role of nuclear weapons in its security strategy.

Now, NATO must address the reality that nuclear deterrence has once again become an important, perhaps central, challenge in preventing armed conflict with Russia. Two generations of citizens need to be educated as to the relevance of nuclear deterrence to their security and freedom and the kinds of capabilities and commitments that a robust nuclear strategy requires.

NATO needs to refresh its nuclear doctrine and employment policies. In the view of Matthew Kroenig, a leading U.S. nuclear deterrence theorist:

NATO must make clear in its nuclear deterrence doctrine that it will respond to any use of nuclear weapons against its members with a devastating nuclear counterstrike. NATO should also retain the option of responding to a strictly conventional Russian assault against a NATO ally with a nuclear response. It should maintain this option not because an early nuclear response would be necessary or automatic, but rather because there is no reason to assure Russia that this would not happen. Moreover, NATO's easternmost neighbors would vastly prefer nuclear deterrence over a potential Russian incursion.<sup>144</sup>

The U.S. and NATO need to address the question of the role that strategic and theater defenses can play in countering Russia's strategy for nuclear coercion. Russian leaders admit their concern that air and missile defenses could degrade their nuclear deterrent. During the Cold War, NATO viewed air and missile defenses as compromising its ability to deter Soviet conventional superiority through reliance on nuclear escalation.

Now, the objective of nuclear deterrence must be to prevent Moscow from escalating to nuclear use, particularly to secure gains from conventional aggression. Denying Moscow credible options for the limited employment of nuclear weapons could help to undermine Russia's strategy for hybrid warfare. Kroenig argues that:

The United States and NATO should upgrade their homeland and theater ballistic and cruise missile defense systems. Though an upgraded missile defense system could not significantly attrit a large-scale Russian attack, it could defend against a more limited strike against the United States or its allies. This could eliminate Russia's option of pursuing a limited de-escalatory strike, forcing Moscow to make the more difficult decision of choosing between launching a larger nuclear attack or staying its hand.<sup>145</sup>

## **Challenging Russia In The Arctic**

As if this were not enough for NATO's political and military leaders to cope with, they are now being asked to respond to a growing danger in yet a third theater: the Arctic. For years, experts on Russia's foreign and security policies have warned that Moscow has a strategy to exert

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<sup>143</sup> <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/nato-must-adapt-to-address-russias-nuclear-brinkmanship/>

<sup>144</sup> [http://www.matthewkroenig.com/Kroenig\\_Russian\\_Nuclear\\_Threat.pdf](http://www.matthewkroenig.com/Kroenig_Russian_Nuclear_Threat.pdf)

<sup>145</sup> Op. cit.

control over much of the Arctic and exploit its vast resources.<sup>146</sup> For more than a decade, the Kremlin has been engaged in a sophisticated, multi-faceted campaign that employs a wide range of diplomatic, legal, economic and military tools to assert and expand its claims of the Arctic.

As relations between NATO and Russia deteriorated in the aftermath of the occupation of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, Moscow has accelerated its efforts to convert theoretical claims to large portions of the Arctic into de facto possession. Simultaneously and not coincidentally, the Russian military has been expanding its military presence and basing in the Far North and Arctic.

Russia has moved aggressively to take control of much of the Arctic from a quixotic claim to vast parts of the region's position. It has seabed (a Russian deep-diving mini-submarine planted a flag on the ocean floor at the North Pole in 2007) and an exclusive claim to the 1,200-mile-long Lomonosov Ridge. Moscow has defied not only international legal norms but also environmental prudence and the technological reality of Arctic energy exploration in making aggressive military moves designed to intimidate its regional neighbors.

Russia has also sought to assert its sovereignty in the Arctic through diplomacy and filing suits in international courts.<sup>147</sup> This month, Russia resubmitted a claim to the United Nations to 463,000 square miles of the Arctic Ocean – about the size of South Africa – based on the geological extension of its continental shelf.<sup>148</sup> The commission that reviews claims under the Convention on the Law of the Sea rejected a similar Russian claim filed in 2001, citing insufficient scientific evidence. But Russia, along with Canada and Denmark (through its administration of Greenland), have pressed ahead with competing stakes.

In recent years, Russia unveiled a new Arctic command, four new Arctic brigade combat teams, 14 new operational airfields, 16 deep water ports and 40 icebreakers with an additional 11 in development.<sup>149</sup> In total, Russia is building 10 radar stations, 13 airfields, a new Arctic combat training center in the Far East and an air-ground firing range in the Far North.<sup>150</sup> Moscow is also projected to finish construction on five new icebreaking ships by the end of the decade.

Former Supreme Allied Commander of Europe General Philip Breedlove described Russian activity in the Arctic as “increasingly troubling,” stating: “their increase in stationing military forces, building and reopening bases, and creating an Arctic military district—all to counter an imagined threat to their internationally undisputed territories—stands in stark contrast to the conduct of the seven other Arctic nations.”<sup>151</sup>

These investments are expensive and impose real opportunity costs on a military that is trying to modernize both its conventional and nuclear forces and conduct multiple foreign operations. Coinciding with Russia's expanded military involvement in Ukraine and Syria, there have been reports of reduced operations in the Arctic as well as cutbacks in planned construction and force

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<sup>146</sup> <http://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdf/files/pub1073.pdf>

<sup>147</sup> <http://www.fletcherforum.org/home/2017/3/8/northward-ho-how-russian-lawfare-is-conquering-the-arctic>

<sup>148</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/05/world/europe/kremlin-stakes-claim-to-arctic-expanse-and-its-resources.html>

<sup>149</sup> <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/25/heres-what-russias-military-build-up-in-the-arctic-looks-like-trump-oil-military-high-north-infographic-map/>

<sup>150</sup> <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/nuclear-icebreakers-clear-the-way-for-arctic-oil-34680>

<sup>151</sup> [https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/nato-summit-2016-time-arctic-strategy#\\_ftn8](https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/nato-summit-2016-time-arctic-strategy#_ftn8)

deployments.<sup>152</sup> Even quasi-civil programs such as building a large fleet of polar icebreakers are reportedly short of funds.<sup>153</sup>

A Competitive Strategies approach to dealing with Russia's growing military threat to the West would seize on this moment. Russia is geostrategically overextended and lacks the resources to pursue a military buildup on multiple fronts simultaneously.

A modest effort by the U.S. and its allies to reassert their presence in the region and develop a coordinated strategy to deter Russian aggression in the Arctic could upset Moscow's plans in Europe and even the Middle East. The Arctic is, in fact, an area of weakness for Moscow and one where even a little show of Western strength could have disproportionate effects.

NATO and the U.S. need to make it clear that they will contest the Kremlin's efforts to dominate the Arctic. The first thing the Trump Administration should do is make good on its pledge to fund a new generation of polar icebreakers. The second is to use lawfare against Russia in international organizations by aggressively pushing back on the Kremlin's illegitimate claims to portions of the Arctic.

A third step would be to institute new anti-submarine warfare exercises in northern waters with allies and friends such as the United Kingdom, Norway, Canada and Sweden. A fourth is to reinstitute patrols by U.S. attack submarines in the Arctic. Finally, the U.S. should expand Army and Marine Corps exercises in the region, with an eye to the ways land forces could support air and naval operations in the Far North.

## Conclusions

The U.S. and its allies are just beginning to come to terms with the reality that they are in another long-term competition with Russia. This presents a monumental challenge in itself.

The 28 members of NATO are not of one mind when it comes to the nature, severity or specifics of the Russian threat. Nor are they on the same page when it comes to the best approach to address Russia's aggressive actions and deter future conflicts. Further complicating the issue of developing appropriate strategies to address this problem are the changes in the military, economic, technological and information balances between the two sides.

It is for these reasons that demonstrating the value of the Competitive Strategies methodology is so important. This approach can provide a unifying system to develop a U.S./NATO strategy that is both long-term and multifaceted. This effort in and of itself, by focusing on strengths and weaknesses and providing a long-term perspective, can be valuable to current policymakers as they seek to deal with near-term issues involving Russia.

There is good reason to believe that the U.S. and its NATO allies can design and conduct a comprehensive CS that will influence Russian behavior and reduce the threat to Europe. Russia is a relatively weak competitor. Over time, it is likely to grow weaker, even in the absence of a targeted Western campaign to capitalize on its vulnerabilities. By employing the Competitive Strategies methodology, the Russian threat to NATO can be significantly reduced over time.

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<sup>152</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/02/18/with-russia-overextended-elsewhere-arctic-cooperation-gets-a-new-chance/>

<sup>153</sup> <https://www.adn.com/arctic/article/strained-russia-cuts-money-icebreakers/2016/03/17/>

The primary competition with Russia should be in areas of Western strength and Russian weakness: economics, information operations, rule of law, the global banking system and advanced technology, particularly commercial IT. The U.S. and its allies need to coordinate strategies to deny Russian access to investment resources and critical technologies for its oil and gas industry. Economic warfare can seriously weaken Russia's ability to invest in high end military forces.

NATO needs to look at ways to increase the distance between Moscow and the former Soviet republics such as Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. This is not a matter of regime change. Rather, NATO and the EU should identify ways to enhance those states' economic independence and political flexibility. In the case of Belarus, closer relations should be pursued slowly and over time.

The U.S. and NATO must compete with Russia in the conventional and nuclear military spheres. It must be made clear to Russia that it will never have a route to a quick and easy conventional victory against NATO, nor a credible option to escalate to the use of nuclear weapons without the certainty of retaliation. NATO needs a well-funded program to counter Russian investments in anti-access/area denial capabilities, particularly its integrated air defense.

EW and cyber need to be priority areas for investment in a CS to counter Russia. EW assets should be directed at negating Russian air defense sensors, ISR assets and communications, command and control systems. NATO is already investing in upgrades to its cyber defenses. More needs to be done to develop not only the means but also the policies, tactics and techniques to support offensive cyber operations in peacetime as well as war.

Air and missile defenses are a necessary component of a NATO Competitive Strategy. Russian leadership continues to be concerned with the potential for defenses to complicate its ability to execute high intensity disarming strikes against NATO. The U.S. and its allies need to exploit these concerns to buttress deterrence and to prevent the destruction of high value military and leadership targets at the outset of conflict. NATO members need to expand their investments in air and missile defense systems.

NATO needs to invest in capabilities and concepts directed at complicating a rapid Russian ground invasion of neighboring territory. There have been proposals to station large, heavy armored forces close to the Russian border to counter any move against the Baltic states. Driving Russian forces into protracted engagements will exacerbate their weaknesses in manpower, logistics and sustainment.

NATO needs to exploit its advantage in naval forces. Surface and subsurface units equipped with a mix of long-range cruise missiles and air and missile defenses can both execute offensive strikes and defend ports of debarkation and other high value land targets. Naval forces, particularly attack submarines, also have a growing role to play in challenging Russian military investments in the Arctic.

The U.S. and NATO need an information operations strategy that not only defends networks and institutions from attack but also conducts offensive actions against Russia. The Russian leadership is vulnerable to an information operations campaign designed to split them from the people. The U.S. and NATO allies should explore the potential for creating 21<sup>st</sup> century versions of Cold War-type information institutions.

The U.S. does not need to match Russia launcher for launcher or warhead for warhead in regards to its nuclear arsenal. Indeed, NATO has tolerated a marked Russian advantage in theater nuclear weapons for decades. However, the U.S. does need to move forward with its program to modernize all legs of its nuclear triad. In addition, funding needs to be provided to ensure procurement of the new nuclear capabilities outlined in the latest Nuclear Posture Review. The goal is to clearly inform Moscow that it cannot execute any nuclear strike against NATO without the certainty of retaliation.

The U.S and its allies must be willing to engage in a long-term competitive campaign to its technological advantage vis-à-vis Russia. Investments need to be made in areas such as robotics, artificial intelligence and autonomy, hypersonics, directed energy, electronic warfare and cyber. NATO needs to focus not just on science and technology, but also on related industrial capabilities that will support high quantity production of advanced weapons systems. It is in the latter area that the West has a distinct advantage over Russia.