



# Prospective Strategy for Baltic Defense

## The Russian Public and War Termination in the Baltic States

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Ever since early 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea, the defense of the Baltic States has been a concern for NATO and the United States. This focused interest stems from the possibility that Article 5, NATO's collective defense clause, might be triggered. Other than a general belief in deterrence, public discussion of Baltic defense has been pessimistic. Russia's ability to overwhelm the forces currently stationed in the Baltic States is emphasized in the discussion, as well as Russia's anti-access and area denial capabilities, which would make any return to the Baltic States after an initial Russian invasion a strenuous endeavor for NATO. (A commonly assumed Russian invasion route is depicted in figure 1, page 60.) These are not the only critical strategic conundrums that NATO could face in the Baltic.

A crowd protests against high-level government corruption 12 June 2017 at an antigovernment rally organized by supporters of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny in Yekaterinburg, Russia. Russian military leaders frequently express concern that such antigovernment mass rallies could easily lead to a so-called "color revolution" with the aid of foreign influence. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

War termination is another vital question that needs a place in discussion of defense of the Baltic States. It is important for defense planners to consider these questions: What does a successful end for NATO look like in the Baltic? And, by what means might it be achieved? This article briefly lays out the relationship between defense planning and war termination, with reference to the Baltic States, before delving into Russia's primary self-identified

weakness—its own public. After examining why the Kremlin believes the Russian public to be a weakness, this article considers the strategic relevance of this weakness and whether NATO has the ability to exploit it to end a possible war for the Baltic States.

## Defense Planning and War Termination

Defense planning is prospective planning for the use of a strategy against an enemy in reality. As Professor of International Politics and Strategy Studies at the University of Reading Colin Gray articulates it, “The defence planner in effect is a practising strategic theorist. ... Strategies are theories, which is to say they are purported explanations of how desired effects can be achieved by selected causes of threat and action applied in a particular sequence.”<sup>1</sup> Defense planners must imagine potential chains of cause and effect despite the overriding condition of their vocation—that the future is inherently uncertain and unknowable, especially in detail. This exercise in imagination must be guided by politics. As Carl von Clausewitz wrote to a colleague seeking feedback on a war-planning thought exercise,

War is not an independent phenomenon, but the continuation of politics by different means. Consequently, the main lines of every major strategic plan are *largely political in nature*, and their political character increases the more the plan encompasses the entire war and the entire state. The plan for the war results directly from the political conditions

of the two belligerent states, as well as from their relationship to other powers. ... According to this point of view, there can be no question of a *purely military* evaluation of a great strategic issue, nor of a purely military scheme to solve it.<sup>2</sup>

Politics sets direction for strategy through enunciation of a preferred end state as well as limits for what is operationally permissible.

Besides essential political guidance, this imaginative exercise of defense planning also requires a combination of specific knowledge about the potential enemy and general empathy—but not sympathy—for his or her perspective: “If the enemy’s actions can reveal his assumptions about what strategic ways he



(Graphic by Arin Burgess, *Military Review*)

**Figure 1. A Commonly Assumed Russian-Invasion Scenario**



fears or values, the strategist should seek to exploit these in order better to achieve his ends.”<sup>3</sup> However, in advance, defense planning the enemy’s actions are less valuable a resource.<sup>4</sup> The opponent’s strategically relevant activities may be scarce or unobservable, and not necessarily reflective of actual wartime priorities. Fortunately, Clausewitz also identified a wide range of potential centers of gravity which may pertain to an adversary in war but may be studied in peacetime: the main army, the capital, a larger ally of the enemy if one exists, and even leaders and public opinion in the right circumstances.<sup>5</sup> A potential enemy need not necessarily take action in the domain of the armed forces to reveal weaknesses that may have strategic relevance.

Much has been written about the defense of the Baltic States since 2014, most of it pessimistic about NATO’s ability to defend the Baltic States should the need ever arise.<sup>6</sup> Few discussions get as far as actually considering war termination because the prospect of immediate defeat in the Baltic is so great and the challenges of forcefully reentering the theater of operations from western Europe and across Scandinavia are so vast and formidable that thinking past them seems too far ahead. One of the few authors examining considerations for ending a NATO-Russian conflict in the Baltic States did not even consider a conventional war, but rather focused on a “little green men” scenario in which Russia postures but does not ultimately act.<sup>7</sup> In this fictional account, Richard D. Hooker Jr. envisions a victorious NATO that, for its part, nevertheless surrenders much in the Baltic and even elsewhere in an effort to gain a peace of dubious value:

All Russian military and subversive activities on the soil of NATO member states must cease. NATO would make a public declaration announcing that Ukraine should not join NATO, but would be free to choose its political and economic future for itself. Resolution of the Crimea issue would be deferred until a future date under UN auspices. Economic sanctions would be lifted and NATO forces would return to their home garrisons, with a promise not to be permanently stationed on the territory of any state formerly a member of the Warsaw Pact. A reinvigorated Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) would monitor the disengagement of all parties and the stationing

of their forces. The NATO-Russian Council would be reactivated to take a lead role in addressing the concerns of ethnic Russian minorities in the Baltic republics.<sup>8</sup>

This particular vision postulates a NATO success but considers only the possibility of what the West terms hybrid warfare, not a conventional force invasion.

It also reflects the readily anticipated difficulty of bringing Russia to terms to end a conflict that Russia might have little incentive to settle. In any potential war—conventional, unconventional, or hybrid—Russia would have enormous geopolitical and strategic advantages that would inhibit Western attempts at coercion. First, Russia’s nuclear arsenal makes any attempt to invade Russian national territory a very dangerous endeavor. Second, compared to NATO, Russia at present displays a significantly greater degree of national unity, which would likely allow it to maintain more sustained political will and commitment to its objectives even through a prolonged period of adversarial, but not violent, confrontation such as that between the Allies and Germany in 1939–40.

Hooker’s analysis makes clear that the West must think clearly about

war termination now because, in the midst of a limited war, it would already be too late to do so effectively. To anticipate future strategy in the Baltic States in the event of war, the defense planner must have a reasonable vision of war termination and its probable salient features. Empathy for Russian viewpoints must play a large role in development of such strategy, for it is only through empathy that we may identify potential Russian weaknesses by which to pressure it into deescalating conflict and accepting defeat. As the defense

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of the Baltic States in a conventional war scenario will likely rest upon NATO's ability to return to the theater of operations after an initial defeat rather than a stalwart and unyielding initial defense, for the purposes of this article achievement of such a NATO forcible return will be assumed. This will allow for the sole consideration of war termination, the heretofore largely unmentioned but vital aspect of strategic anticipation and defense planning for any hypothetical NATO-Russia war.

## Russian Geopolitical Perspectives

The key to anticipating strategically and politically successful war termination in a conventional war with Russia lies in Russian geopolitical thought. This points to Russia's major weakness—or at least, what Vladimir Putin and his inner circle believe Russia's major weakness to be—the Russian public.

Three main strands of Russian geopolitical thought point to this conclusion. First is Russian nuclear strategic thought and Russia's threshold for the use of nuclear weapons. Second is Russian discussion of hybrid

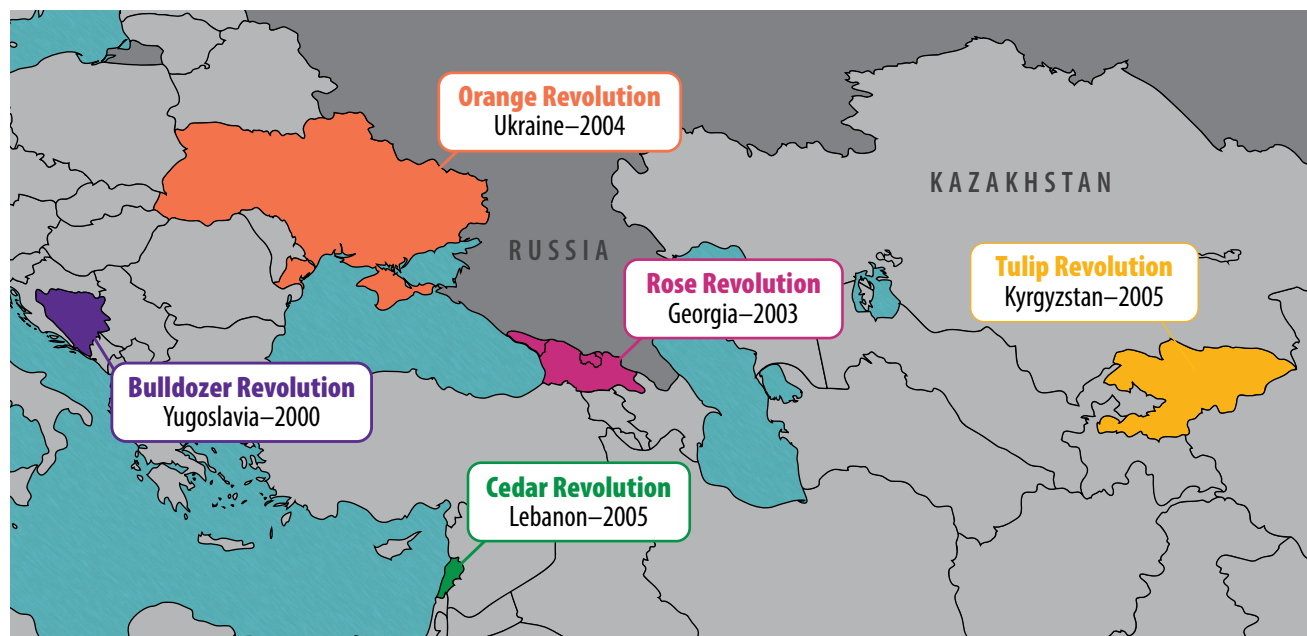
A Russian tank leads a convoy of vehicles 1 August 2008 in South Ossetia. The Russian invasion, in what Russia called a peace enforcement operation, forced the retreat of Georgian forces from South Ossetia. Russia still occupies that country in violation of a ceasefire agreement. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

warfare and the color revolutions. Third is what has been called Russia's grand strategy of mobilization.

**Russian nuclear strategic thought.** Russia is not particularly open about its nuclear strategy or its nuclear threshold. Its military doctrine published in December 2014 stated that Russia

shall reserve for itself the right to employ nuclear weapons in response to the use against it and/or its allies of nuclear and other kinds of weapons of mass destruction, as well as in the case of aggression against the Russian Federation with use of conventional weapons when the state's very existence has been threatened.<sup>9</sup>





(Graphic by Arin Burgess, *Military Review*, based on an original map from Wikimedia Commons)

**Figure 2. Regional “Color Revolutions” in Close Proximity to Russia**

Although this is seemingly clear, Russian officials have muddled the waters in statements since 2008, variously saying that “Russia may use nuclear weapons against NATO missile defense facilities, and may increase the readiness of its nuclear forces in reaction to limited regional scenarios that do not involve WMD attacks or threats to its ‘very existence.’”<sup>10</sup>

One may wonder whether this is a calculated effort to induce uncertainty, allow Russia nuclear flexibility, and pose a threat that leaves something to chance. Irrespective, the Russian-declared threshold for nuclear weapons use affects any strategy that NATO may pursue. Given the inherently adversarial circumstances of war, wherein each side tries to overthrow its opponent and thereby introduces the inevitable prospect of escalation, any war with Russia might plausibly intensify to nuclear use.

In recognition both of this possibility and of its undesirability, NATO could unilaterally declare national Russian territory to be a sanctuary, in much the same way that Manchuria was a sanctuary for the Chinese during the Korean War and North Vietnam was partly and variably a sanctuary during the Vietnam War. Such a declaration that specifies the West has no interest in posing an existential danger to Russia and thereby also endangering itself to a Russian nuclear strike seems inevitable as a

political and strategic signal to Russia, whether it would be accurately received and perceived or not.

The limits placed by sanctuary on operations may be more or less strict. All forms of military power could be banned from entering into Russian territory or airspace, as in the Korean War vis-à-vis Manchuria, or airpower and cruise missiles could be allowed, at least against certain targets, as in Vietnam. Given the range and ability of Russian weapon systems based within Russia but able to interfere in operations beyond Russia’s borders, the Vietnam airpower precedent may be the more likely option.

The upshot of this politically probable Western unilateral declaration of sanctuary could be that the Russian army would not serve as one of the continuous centers of gravity throughout the war. If operations in the Baltic turn against the Russians, their army might, albeit under pressure, withdraw from the Baltic States altogether. The Russian army could then simply remove itself from the playing board by entering the sanctuary of the adjacent Russian border and decline to engage NATO forces—although, depending on the details of any NATO sanctuary policy, it may still find itself under threat from NATO airpower.

If the Russians removed themselves without relinquishing their political will to continue the war,



pursuant to Clausewitz's observations on center of gravity, the Russian capital itself or Russia's allies would then become the next prime centers of gravity subject to attack. However, as a practical matter, Moscow as a potential center of gravity would be inconceivable, and in such a war, Russia would not have any allies whose presence would be meaningful with regard to war termination. As a result, only one choice from Clausewitz's center of gravity checklist remains—Russian public opinion, which would be the only feasible Russian vulnerability susceptible to attack short of elevation to nuclear conflict. Ironically, Russian public opinion is already understood by Russian elites to be the major weakness in Russian efforts to achieve its political will across the globe.

**Hybrid warfare and the color revolutions.** The Russians themselves acknowledge their public opinion vulnerability. Russian Chief of the General Staff General Valery Gerasimov garnered much attention in the West during 2014 after Russia's conquest of Crimea when it came to light that he had already spoken about what the West terms hybrid warfare.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, it was widely assumed that Gerasimov had essentially laid out in his comments the blueprint for how Russia would

A group of "little green men" stands guard at the military base 9 March 2014 during the 2014 Ukrainian crisis in Perevalne, Crimea. The "little green men" moniker was used to describe fighters who wore uniforms without unit or national identifying information to maintain anonymity but were commonly thought to be Russian soldiers or ethnic Russian militia recruited from within Ukraine. They were widely reported to have preceded heavier Russian conventional ground forces in the 2014 seizure of Crimea. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

use force in the future to achieve its desired political objectives, and had vindicated this strategy through direct experience in Crimea. This was, in fact, not the case. Rather, as Charles Bartles notes,

There is a general consensus in Russian military circles that hybrid war is a completely Western concept as no Russian military officer or strategist has discussed it, except to mention the West's use of the term, or to mention the West's use of hybrid warfare against Russia ... The Russian military has been adamant that they do not practice a hybrid-war strategy.<sup>12</sup>

However, the Russian leader maintained that Russia is preparing to practice, and, in fact, is practicing against



the West what it believes the West has been already been using against Russia for some time. Gerasimov has defined Russian approach to contemporary warfare and its reaction to Western actions within its sphere of influence as “new type warfare.”<sup>13</sup>

In offering his understanding of the nature of contemporary warfare, Gerasimov analyzed what he considered to be one of the West’s key methods of undermining Russian power and influence abroad. This method, as previously noted, was described as *color revolution* (*color* derived from the common use of a color by activist groups to describe their revolutionary movement). A number of countries around Russia had experienced anti-Russian revolutions, which, in Russian eyes, have all been orchestrated by Western agents (see figure 2, page 63). These color revolutions are considered to be methods by which the West may use covert, semicovert, and public means to destabilize a chosen country, often leading to a change of government toward one that follows pro-Western and anti-Russian policies.<sup>14</sup>

This trend arguably began in the late 1980s with the Singing Revolution in what are now again the independent Baltic States. As Anatol Lieven notes, “Soviet loyalists have always argued that the CIA was behind the national movements, via agents from the Baltic emigrations.”<sup>15</sup> The revolutions most often highlighted by the Russians include the Rose Revolution of 2003 in Georgia, the Orange Revolution of 2004 in Ukraine, the Tulip Revolution of 2005 in Kyrgyzstan, and most recently, the Maidan Revolution of 2013–14 in Ukraine. In Russian analyses, the various protests of the Arab Spring in 2011 also fall within the category of color revolutions.

Russians frequently point to public rhetorical support that high-ranking U.S. policy makers often give to such color protestors. This Western support has manifested itself not just in various countries surrounding Russia or throughout the Middle East and North Africa over the years, but even in Russia itself during and after the Russian presidential elections of 2012. Such public support has political consequences at even the individual level in Russia, including its relations with the West. One observer asserts, “Putin’s personal sense of *obida* (offense) at U.S. support for the public demonstrations against him in late 2011 and early 2012 was the single most important reason behind the hardening of Russian policy toward Washington.”<sup>16</sup> The United States had essentially

sought to chip away at Russia’s main self-identified susceptibility, an unforgivable act for Putin.

Russia leaders also point to the large sums of Western money that fund nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the declared missions of which often include governmental transparency, combating corruption in politics, and so forth. From a Russian perspective, such reforms may weaken Russian influence beyond its borders, which often relies on corruption and political and financial favors, alongside more open and direct funding of organizations whose supposed mission is to spread Russian culture.<sup>17</sup> Numerous Western NGOs have been shut down in Russia itself, on the basis that they are instruments of not just foreign but even of hostile power and seek only to undermine Russia’s own power—often because they oppose numerous Russian social policies and advocate governmental transparency, which illuminates the corruption and poor functionality of government in Russia.<sup>18</sup>

The importance that the Kremlin ascribes to these revolutions and the ostensible means by which they are encouraged cannot be overestimated. In its own eyes, an arc of crisis girdles Russia, primarily but not exclusively to its south and southwest. Andrew Monaghan, director of Research on Russia and Northern European Defence and Security at the University of Oxford’s Changing Character of War Centre, concludes,

The narrative trajectory of international instability can be traced through the NATO air campaign in Kosovo in 1999, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and then the air campaign in Libya in 2011 and the civil wars in Libya and Syria. Today, therefore, if the Euro-Atlantic community thinks of Russian aggression, even expansionism in post-Ukraine terms, Moscow sees international instability in a longer-term and wider post-Arab Spring context.<sup>19</sup>

Significantly, although some of these crises originated from or were exacerbated by overt Western intervention (e.g., Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq), many others were caused by the (ostensibly U.S.-backed) color revolutions, including Libya, Syria, and Ukraine.

Not only are the current crises perceived by Russians as a threat to Russia to varying extents, but it is also an open question whether Russia can safeguard itself from such dangers. According to Monaghan, “the



Russian leadership is aware of the domestic systemic weaknesses which mean that Russia is not prepared to cope with the threats which emanate from such international instability. Moscow's responses must therefore be understood as emergency measures tantamount to putting the country onto a war footing."<sup>20</sup>

**Russian strategy of mobilization.** In consequence, Russian leaders seek not only to protect Russia's ability to wield power in—and beyond—Russia but are also even fortifying the Russian popular opinion of Russia's government and the population's still strong support for Putin. To that end, Russia is undertaking a massive synchronized effort to mobilize itself as a nation militarily, economically, and socially.

Russia has a history of mobilization dating back to the 1920s, when Russia's previous incarnation, the Soviet Union, was feeling besieged by the capitalist world. *Mobilizatsiya* in Russian has two meanings. First, "mobilisation can apply to a whole economy, society and polity, and refer to a concerted effort to raise it to another state or level of development."<sup>21</sup> However, "in a narrow, more technical sense, mobilisation also involves centralised leadership by the state, but in this case it is solely to prepare the economy and structures of power to meet the challenge of possible military aggression against the nation."<sup>22</sup>

Although many outside observers of Russia are focusing on the economic and military aspects of mobilization in Russia today, the societal aspects of the broader interpretation of mobilization are equally important. This is particularly so in the present context of a fear of color revolutions and hybrid warfare purportedly aimed at Russia in which fortifying and unifying society itself has become one of the main targets of strategic activity.

This emphasis on society is reflected in Putin's May Decrees, which he signed after returning to the presidency in 2012 and which formed a large part of his election campaign during the previous year. As Monaghan observes, these decrees "cover a broad agenda, including economic and social policy, healthcare, housing and utilities, education and science, demography, inter-ethnic relations, state administration, foreign policy, and military service and the armed forces."<sup>23</sup> Of these sectors, although foreign policy and military are indeed present, "the bulk of them do address matters that are politically and socially important to the Russian population. Putin has regularly emphasized that only a 'consolidated

society' can fully carry out the development strategy. Reinforced by electoral victory, the May Decrees are part of this consolidation effort."<sup>24</sup>

Russia anticipates conflict, if not outright war, in its future. It has been taking measures to prepare for this future through its multidimensional mobilization. Nevertheless, "These are in effect emergency measures, since the Russian leadership is well aware that war is a test of society and that, despite the recent military experience gained in Ukraine and Syria, Russia is not ready for this test."<sup>25</sup> The Kremlin also has difficulty trusting its society, given its perception of Western methods of subversion and the experience of the 2012 election, when many protests against Putin were organized that were motivated by Western liberal ideals. Russia's late 2016 acquisition of China's "great firewall" internet censorship technology is indicative of this mistrust. A similar, but even more serious, indication is Russia's decision in late May 2017 to subordinate the Russian Army to the National Guard should an internal crisis warrant such a response.<sup>26</sup> Whether the Russian public really is as volatile as the Kremlin seems to think, this mistrust is a vulnerability that may be exploitable for strategic advantage should NATO and Russia ever go to war, perhaps even to the degree of advantageously terminating the war—whether in the Baltic States or elsewhere.

Yet, such a task would be an uphill endeavor. Strategists in the West may safely assume that should Russia ever attack the Baltic States, the Russian public would initially favor such an action, as analogously suggested by the Russian government's narrative during the operation that led to the annexation of Crimea and the manner in which the Russian public responded.

## The Strategic Relevance of Russian Public Opinion

As one of Russia's most significant self-identified weaknesses, Russian public opinion stands as a potential vulnerability that may be exploited as a way to inhibit further Russian use of force in the case of a hypothetical war between NATO and Russia for the Baltic States. However, it is one question to identify a weakness and another to imagine how to exploit it. Is Russian public opinion a center of gravity that NATO could actually be able to attack to break Russia's hypothetical will to fight? Various factors are relevant to any given answer, including the landscape of the Russian media, the state



of the Russian opposition, and the greatest wildcard of all: Russian public response to a hypothetical apparent Russian strategic failure and military defeat.

Russia has been gradually minimizing its societal and informational vulnerability to the West and Western ideas. Ever since the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999, Russia has responded to demonstrations of Western—and particularly American—power and will to spread liberalism with increasing authoritarianism and domestic repression in an effort to safeguard itself from the influence of such inimical ideas.<sup>27</sup> This naturally reduces the scope for NATO information operations against the Russian population in war. If the Russian public cannot be reached, then it cannot be exploited.

Although Russian public opinion may be Russia's weakness, it is also malleable under the Kremlin's own narrative pressure. The Russian government embarked on an extensive domestic public-perception management campaign throughout 2014 in conjunction with its annexation of Crimea and its involvement in the war in the Donbas. Among its most important efforts were the inculcation of the arguments that "the ascension of Crimea to Russia was a legitimate act of self-determination

Protesters shout slogans 26 March 2017 at Dvortsovaya (Palace) Square in St. Petersburg, Russia. Thousands of people crowded into St. Petersburg for the unsanctioned protest against the Russian government—the biggest such gathering during a wave of nationwide protests that were the most extensive show of defiance against the Russian government in years. The writing on the protester's face reads "Putin is a thief." The author of this article contends that Russia's major vulnerability in the event of a Russian invasion of a NATO country, and the best hope for a peace settlement, will be found in the tenuous popular support by the Russian populace for such an invasion. (Photo by Dmitri Lovetsky, Associated Press)

and not annexation by Russia," that Crimea was one of Russia's historical and cultural cores, and that the West's criticisms of Russian actions were irrationally anti-Russian and a legacy Cold War mentality.<sup>28</sup>

In the context of the war in Ukraine, one Russian observer noted that in March 2015, 57 percent of the Russian population was satisfied with Russia's borders and 64 percent believed that "Russia shouldn't keep the former Soviet republics under its control."<sup>29</sup> Yet, Russians simultaneously largely approved of the annexation of Crimea, and there has been little opposition to



its involvement in the Donbas. This relatively positive viewpoint was based first on the belief that these actions were taken to protect Russia's own ethnic and cultural world and, second, that Russia itself was supposedly not intervening directly.<sup>30</sup> Russian manipulation of public opinion seems to be working; Russians have largely expressed indifference to casualties in Ukraine—when the public even finds out about the casualties—in a way they did not during the wars in Chechnya or Georgia.<sup>31</sup> Russia holds the advantage over NATO with regard to influencing Russian public opinion.

Moreover, the annexation of Crimea represented the first time that Putin “used explicitly ethnic nationalist terms to explain and justify his foreign policy moves” to the Russian, as well as international, public.<sup>32</sup> However, in 2015–16, Putin pulled back from the ethnonationalist narrative as he had putatively begun thinking that it might pose too large a risk to unified Russian state stability. Russian nationalism is a patchwork of competing substate, parastate, and state actors, each of whom relates differently with the Kremlin—and some of whom are hostile to it. Russian nationalism has the potential to be a threat as well as a support to Russia's stability and unity.<sup>33</sup> The Cossacks in particular have been increasingly divided over Russia's actions in Ukraine.<sup>34</sup> This mosaic picture naturally further complicates any potential efforts by NATO to strike at Russian public opinion in war.

Putin is widely considered in Russia to govern on behalf of the *siloviki*, or oligarchs and important businesses, rather than for the middle class or the Russian people as a whole. However, this common belief does not affect Putin's own popularity, although it does reflect upon the popularity of those around him. In an effort to change the frame of reference away from powerful individuals, the Kremlin has essentially begun to offer the Russian people a new social contract: rather than growing economic prosperity in return for loyalty, the state is offering “the feeling of inclusion in a power that was rising from its knees,” for which Russia is demanding both loyalty and “a preparedness to sacrifice.”<sup>35</sup> Russia is actively fortifying the mentality of its citizenry for war.

The condition and role of the Russian opposition is also crucial. One assessment of the prospect of color revolution in Russia noted that although the regime itself is vulnerable, it also has a number of advantages, including ready access to money, a huge geographic territory with a mostly low population density, and Putin's own personal

popularity. Russia currently does not have an opposition that is capable of inspiring the level of challenge necessary to overturn Putin.<sup>36</sup> Numerous protests have broken out from late 2011, when Putin was campaigning for his third term as president, to the present day, including antiwar protests in 2014 and anticorruption protests in 2017. However, these appear to have had hardly any positive (from a Western viewpoint) policy impact. Even if NATO could reach the Russian public and navigate the various perspectives to influence it in an advantageous manner, it would remain an open question whether this would actually have any impact on Russian policy in leading to the end of a hypothetical war or not. The opposition may not be able to harness Russian disapproval, particularly as major opposition leaders are increasingly sidelined through prison time, smear campaigns, or deniable assassination. That said, some observers suggest that the Russian opposition is nonetheless strengthening and cite a doubling of the opposition's presence in cities across Russia between the anticorruption protests of 26 March and those of 12 June 2017.<sup>37</sup>

The overall situation paints a fairly bleak picture for NATO if it were to seek to influence Russian public opinion. Russia has been fortifying its population through numerous policies ranging from the increasing suppression of nonapproved perspectives, to revision of the social contract, the containment and even elimination of opposition leaders, and other manipulation of the media landscape. Is there any opportunity for NATO to leverage the supposed weakness of the Russian public for strategic effect?

There still remain unknown factors that may yet benefit NATO. The “feeling of inclusion in a power that was rising from its knees,” which the Kremlin promises the Russian public in their new mutual social contract, is based upon Russia's increasing ability and will to act independently and forcefully in international affairs, especially in defiance of the West, as well as upon a string of apparently reasonably successful military operations. Except for a handful of disastrous episodes concerning internal security, Russia under Putin has not suffered a public military failure—and certainly none in its foreign interventions. The Russian public may be largely apathetic to casualties in Ukraine and Syria, but these casualties, at least the publicly acknowledged ones, are orders of magnitude lower than the casualties suffered in the Chechen wars or in Afghanistan

during the Cold War, wars whose ineffective conduct aroused significant Russian public disapproval. It remains to be seen how the Russian public would react to a major military defeat in a discretionary Russian military adventure under Putin.

Even given this wild card, does NATO itself have the capacity to influence the Russian public? NATO may not necessarily be prepared to exploit the Russian public's impressionability at whichever level. U.S. Joint Publication (JP) 3-13, *Information Operations*, for example, conceives of information operations as "the integrated employment, during military operations, of IRCs [information-related capabilities] in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own."<sup>38</sup> JP 3-13 mentions foreign public opinion only once, and not in the context of influencing it. U.S. information operations target the potential enemy's own decision-making, rather than the public opinion behind it. Moreover, since Russia is gradually shutting down possible channels of influence, NATO's conceptual limitation of lacking a doctrine for influencing the foreign public

opinion of an adversary is also becoming an opportunity problem in the specific context of Russia.

## Conclusion

The public defense debate concerning the Baltic States has tended to focus on matters relating to the immediate defense and early period of a hypothetical war with Russia. There is good reason for this, as the problems NATO would face are grave. However, it is also necessary to think further into the future and grapple with considerations of war termination. Ending any war in the name of Baltic defense with success would be a difficult endeavor as the geostrategic conditions inherently benefit Russia. Perhaps NATO's best opportunity to exert active pressure on Russia for the purposes of war termination would come from the Kremlin's pervasive suspicion of the strength and loyalty of its own citizenry. Russia recognizes this and has been making consistent efforts over the past two decades to strengthen and mentally fortify the Russian public. Heightened Western information efforts aimed at Russian public opinion are nonetheless worthy of further and more detailed consideration for eventual strategic effect. ■

## Notes

1. Colin S. Gray, *Strategy and Defence Planning: Meeting the Challenge of Uncertainty* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 29–30.

2. Quoted in Peter Paret and Daniel Moran, eds., *Carl von Clausewitz: Two Letters on Strategy* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1984), 21.

3. Peter Randall, "Strategy and the Role of the Enemy," *Infinity Journal* 4, no. 3 (Spring 2015): 31

4. Ibid.

5. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, eds. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 596.

6. David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Arroyo Center, 2016), accessed 20 November 2017, [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1200/RR1253/RAND\\_RR1253.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1200/RR1253/RAND_RR1253.pdf); David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, "Outnumbered, Outranged, and Outgunned: How Russia Defeats NATO," War on the Rocks (website), 21 April 2016, accessed 20 November 2017, <http://warontherocks.com/2016/04/outnumbered-outranged-and-outgunned-how-russia-defeats-nato/>; Michael Kofman, "Fixing NATO Deterrence in the East or: How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love NATO's Crushing Defeat by Russia," War on the Rocks (website), 12 May 2016, accessed 20 November 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/05/fixing-nato-deterrence-in-the-east-or-how-i-learned-to-stop-worrying-and-love-natos-crushing-defeat-by-russia/>.

7. The term "little green men" refers to masked soldiers in unmarked army uniforms and was first used by the Russian government during the annexation of Crimea to refer to those soldiers who occupied or blockaded Simferopol Airport, military bases throughout Crimea, and the Crimean parliament building in Simferopol.

8. Richard D. Hooker Jr., "Operation Baltic Fortress, 2016: NATO Defends the Baltic States," *RUSI Journal* 160, no. 3 (2015): 33.

9. Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, "Russian Nuclear Forces, 2016," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 72, no. 3 (2016): 127.

10. Ibid.

11. Charles K. Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," *Military Review* 96, no. 1 (January–February 2016): 30–38.

12. Ibid., 33–34.

13. Valery Gerasimov, "Contemporary Warfare and Current Issues for the Defense of the Country," *Military Review* 97, no. 6 (November–December 2017): 27.

14. Ieva Bērziņa, "The Russian 'Colour Counterrevolution' Model for Containing Geopolitical Expansion by the West," *The Journal of Military Operations* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 23.

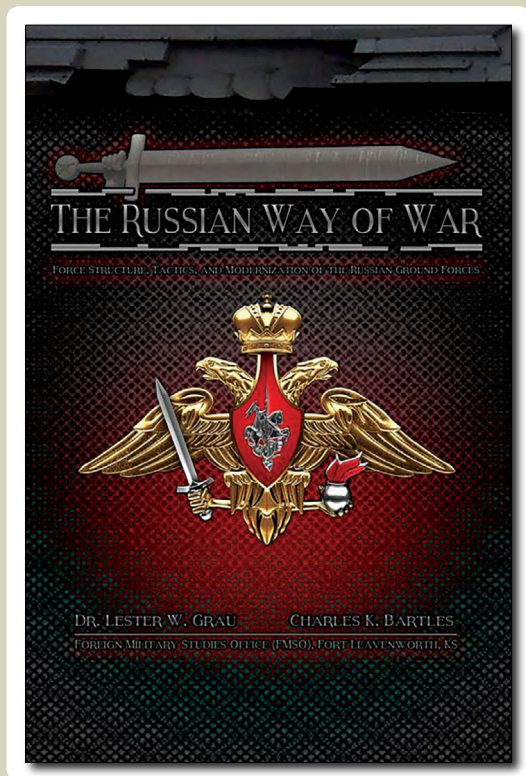
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## WE RECOMMEND



Russia's 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in defiance of world opinion and international law, continuing material support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine, military exercises threatening the Baltic, an impressive and successful campaign to prop up the Syrian government, and aggressive behavior along its borders with eastern Europe especially toward nations that were formerly part of the Soviet Union have resuscitated keen international interest in the Russian armed forces. Students of armed conflict appear especially interested in the current structure, doctrine, and capabilities of Russian armed forces as contrasted to those of their Soviet-era predecessors as well as their internally debated plans for future development. However, assessments of the true state of the Russian armed forces are diverse and often contradictory. This book helps fill part of the void of understanding as a tutorial reference guide that provides authoritative insight into the current state of Russian ground forces, including how they are structured, how they fight, and how they are modernizing.

To view this publication, please visit <http://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/Hot%20Spots/Documents/Russia/2017-07-The-Russian-Way-of-War-Grau-Bartles.pdf>.

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