Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements

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Preface

The escalation in tensions between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) since 2014 has led to numerous proposals to enhance U.S. and NATO posture on the Alliance's eastern flank. Despite its overall military advantages, NATO faces a clear imbalance in conventional capabilities in regions bordering Russia, such as the Baltics. To address this local imbalance, analysts and policymakers have designed proposals to increase the apparent costs and reduce the probability of success of any attack on a NATO member that Russia might contemplate. Whatever posture enhancements the United States and NATO decide to pursue, their goal is to produce a change in Russian behavior. Therefore, the nature of Russian responses will determine the utility and advisability of whatever actions NATO decides to take. Potential Russian reactions could run the gamut, from tacit acceptance of U.S. and NATO actions and a reduction in any willingness to consider an attack on NATO, to a sharp increase in nearby Russian forces designed to counterbalance U.S. and NATO moves, to a precipitous escalation to direct conflict. Russia could also respond to U.S. and NATO military moves by attempting to exploit nonmilitary vulnerabilities in the United States or other NATO countries. Assessing the likelihood of potential Russian reactions is therefore a vital component of any analysis regarding which posture enhancements the United States and NATO should pursue. This report develops a framework that analysts can use for this purpose.

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Summary

The escalation in tensions between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) since 2014 has led to numerous proposals to enhance U.S. and NATO posture on the Alliance's eastern flank. Despite its overall military advantages, NATO faces an imbalance in conventional capabilities in regions bordering Russia, such as the Baltics. To address this local imbalance, analysts and policymakers have designed proposals to increase the apparent costs and reduce the probability of success of any attack on a NATO member that Russia might contemplate. While some enhancements are in the process of being implemented following the 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit, analysts have made several additional proposals that would represent more dramatic changes in U.S. and NATO posture.

Whatever posture enhancements the United States and NATO decide to pursue, their goal is to produce a change in Russian behavior. Therefore, the nature of Russian responses will determine the utility and advisability of whatever actions NATO decides to take. Potential Russian reactions could run the gamut, from tacit acceptance of U.S. and NATO actions and a reduction in any willingness to consider an attack on NATO, to a sharp increase in nearby Russian forces designed to counterbalance U.S. and NATO moves, to a precipitous escalation to direct conflict. Russia could also respond to U.S. and NATO military moves by attempting to exploit nonmilitary vulnerabilities in the United States or other NATO countries. Determining the likelihood of potential Russian reactions is therefore a vital component of any analysis regarding which capability and posture enhancements the United States and NATO should pursue. It is also a difficult task. Analysts have failed to predict Russian actions in the past, most notably the 2014 invasion and annexation of Crimea. However, rather than showing the futility of predicting Russian behavior, such failures underline the importance of more-rigorous study and analysis, despite the difficulties involved.

Building a Framework for Assessing Russian Reactions

This report develops an analytical framework to better understand how Russia is likely to react to potential U.S. and NATO posture enhancements. This framework draws on an analysis of three main sources of information. First, we read what the Russians have written about U.S. and NATO intentions, U.S. and NATO capabilities, Russian strategic objectives, and related issues. Russia has a robust culture of writing and discussion regarding strategic issues, and these sources can help inform our understanding of what the Russians care most about and why. Second, we examined the historical record to see what issues, in what context, have prompted strong Russian reactions in the past. Russia and NATO members have had more

than two decades of post-Soviet strategic interactions, including notable conflicts in Kosovo, Georgia, and Ukraine, and several rounds of NATO expansion, all of which occurred alongside substantial variation in relative Russian economic and military capabilities. Although the manner in which Russia has reacted to events in the past is no guarantee that its future reactions will be similar, we can analyze these events to better understand Russian interests and the relative importance Russia appears to place on different issues. Third, we reviewed the extensive academic and policy literature on issues that pertain to Russian strategic thinking. We considered unique aspects of Russia's history and domestic politics, as well as how states generally respond to political and security challenges like those Russia faces today. Concepts from the international relations literature, such as diversionary warfare and the security dilemma, may therefore have substantial relevance for understanding Russian motivations and behaviors going forward.

Our evaluation of these sources highlighted 11 key factors that analysts should consider when attempting to determine possible Russian reactions to U.S. and NATO posture enhancements. These factors can be divided into three main categories: the broader strategic context (including the distribution of capabilities between Russian and NATO forces), Russian domestic context, and characteristics of the proposed posture enhancements. The factors are summarized in Table S.1.[1] We also conducted case studies of key moments in Russian-NATO interactions over the past 20 years — such as the 1999 Kosovo War, the 2002 decision to offer NATO membership to the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), the 2008 Georgia War, and the 2014 crisis in Ukraine — to illustrate how these key factors can help explain past Russian behavior.

Table S.1
Key Factors Likely to Affect Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements

Category	Key Factor
Strategic context	• NATO's relative overall capabilities
	• NATO's relative local capabilities
	• Russian perceptions of NATO's intentions
	• Russian perceptions of NATO's willingness to defend its members against aggression
Russian domestic context	• Extent of threats to regime legitimacy
	• Relative power and preferences of factions within Russia's elite
	• Preferences of Vladimir Putin
Characteristics of posture enhancements	• Effect on strategic stability
	• Effect on conventional capability
	• Location
	• Extent of infrastructure improvements

[1] Russian intentions or motivations to pursue a conflict with the United States or other NATO members are naturally central to determining Russian reactions to possible posture enhancements. In this framework, we treat Russian intentions as being informed and shaped by the key factors listed in Table S.1. Our analysis throughout this report therefore closely scrutinizes the potential for changes in Russian intentions or motivations as a result of the identified key factors, but we do not separate these intentions as a distinct key factor, treating them instead as an intermediate variable.

Illustrating How the Framework Can Be Used

Having developed a framework for assessing the likelihood of potential Russian reactions to U.S. and NATO posture enhancements (Table S.1), we then illustrated how it could be applied. We did so by first assessing potential Russian reactions to enhancements that are already in progress as a result of the 2016 Warsaw Summit and the United States' ongoing European Reassurance Initiative. These enhancements are likely to be implemented over the near term (that is, the next one to three years) when the strategic and Russian domestic contexts in which they will take place are likely to be most similar to the present.

Overall, our analysis suggests that NATO's deterrent against a conventional attack by Russia on a NATO member is currently strong. Implementation of already announced U.S. and NATO posture enhancements is most likely to further decrease this already low risk of an attack. The current strength of NATO's deterrent stems from its large edge in overall conventional capabilities and the strong signals, enhanced by clear actions and statements since 2014, that NATO, and the United States in particular, would respond militarily to any aggression against the Baltic States or other NATO allies where posture enhancements are being implemented. Therefore, it is highly likely that Russia perceives that any aggressive actions sufficient to trigger Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty would result in direct military conflict with at least several key NATO members. In addition, Russia retains substantial defensive capabilities of its own, particularly its nuclear deterrent, which should minimize fears that the relatively modest NATO posture enhancements currently in progress would be used for direct aggression against Russian territory over the near term.

Furthermore, there is currently little evidence that Russia is interested in a direct military conflict with the United States. Russia does not appear to count any current NATO territory, including the Baltic States, within the sphere where it is willing to use force to preserve its influence. Although Russia has used military force in post-Soviet states over the past two decades and has conducted numerous lower-level provocations involving NATO allies (including limited cyber attacks), it has taken no actions that approach announced U.S. or NATO redlines for invoking Article 5. Moreover, in the operations that Russia has undertaken, such as in Ukraine, Russia's behavior appears to have been highly sensitive to military costs. A direct attack on a NATO member in response to posture enhancements currently in progress would represent a level of cost and risk acceptance that has no precedence in prior Russian behavior. Further enhancements could send a stronger signal of U.S. and NATO willingness to defend Alliance members and could alter Russian calculations regarding what immediate military aims it could achieve through aggression, but under current strategic and Russian domestic conditions, such benefits are likely to be marginal.

That said, certain factors indicate that the risks of an aggressive Russian reaction—including, under certain circumstances, a military conflict between Russia and NATO—may be growing. Russian elites increasingly appear to have concluded that the long-term goals of the United States and NATO are not compatible with the security of the current regime in Moscow. Russian leaders have noted with concern the steady conventional posture enhancements in Eastern Europe (now including former Soviet territory), ballistic missile defense systems, and the shift in strategic orientation of states that Russia views as clearly within its sphere of influence. All of these suggest to Moscow that, although the threat of retaliation from Russian strategic nuclear forces can prevent a direct attack on Russia, other Russian security concerns, including political threats to Russian regime stability, are not accepted as legitimate by

the United States and NATO. Until it changes, this perception is likely to continue to increase the risk of conflict in Europe. In addition, while the regime in Moscow currently has a strong hold on power, there are long-term domestic threats to the Kremlin, most notably the country's poor economic performance, the lack of certainty regarding how a transition to a post-Putin leadership would be handled, and the potential for more-virulent nationalists to become a more powerful political force. Finally, although NATO has consistently expressed a clear commitment to the defense of all of its members, that commitment could weaken, or appear to weaken, under different political leadership in the United States or other key NATO countries. If this were to occur, the risk of miscalculation and misperception between Russia and NATO over redlines, particularly in a crisis, could substantially increase, which could, in turn, raise the potential for inadvertent escalation and direct conflict.

While we assess that a Russian attack on NATO in the near term is highly unlikely, it also seems probable that Russia will explore other avenues to signal its displeasure with ongoing U.S. and NATO posture enhancements. Russia has already announced that it intends to adjust its domestic force posture on its western borders to compensate for a larger NATO presence. In the past, Russia has used a variety of mechanisms to respond to U.S. and NATO actions that it perceives as threatening; such mechanisms include withdrawing from multilateral security treaties, sending forces for provocative out-of-area deployments in the Americas, and threatening to base Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad, among others. Other options to protest U.S. and NATO enhancements in the near term could include targeting cross-domain areas of asymmetric concern to the United States and NATO, such as the implementation of the Iran nuclear deal, increasing support for far-right Western political parties, and cyber attacks on politically or economically sensitive Western targets.

To assess potential Russian reactions to proposed larger-scale U.S. and NATO posture enhancements on the Alliance's eastern flank, we conducted a scenario analysis of how Russia, and the strategic context between Russia and NATO, could evolve over the next decade. This led to the development of three main scenarios: a baseline scenario in which current trends continue more or less as anticipated, a scenario in which Russian domestic weakness accelerates dramatically, and a scenario in which NATO becomes notably less cohesive or more distracted. In these scenarios, larger U.S. and NATO posture enhancements in the Baltic region implemented in the context of a more vulnerable Russian regime have the potential to be destabilizing, while larger such enhancements implemented in the context of increasing Russian perceptions of NATO weakness would tend to enhance deterrence and limit the risk of conflict.

Key Observations Regarding Russian Decisionmaking

Although the primary aim of this report was to build this analytical framework, several key points emerged from our illustrative application of the framework to ongoing or proposed U.S. and NATO posture enhancements. These key observations include the following:

- *Russian perceptions of U.S. and NATO capability and resolve*. Although Russian rhetoric sometimes characterizes the West as weak or irresolute, Russian leaders' current behavior suggests that they see a strong commitment from NATO, and particularly the United

States, to defend its allies. Combine that with NATO's clear overall edge in conventional capabilities, and it is likely that Russia currently assesses that direct aggression against a NATO member would likely result in a very damaging, and potentially disastrous, military conflict.

- *Hardening Russian threat perceptions of NATO*. Russian elites appear to have increasingly concluded that the United States and NATO represent long-term political and potentially military threats to the current regime in Moscow. Although the United States and NATO can be militarily deterred for the time being, many Russian policymakers appear to believe that the prospects for a stable, long-term accommodation with the United States and NATO are limited. This perception, if not reversed, represents an unstable feature of the European security order that increases the risk of conflict, inadvertent or otherwise.
- *Limited Russian strategic interest in the Baltics*. Our review of Russian documents and recent Russian strategic literature found very little discussion of the Baltic States as an important strategic area. To be sure, Russia has taken and is continuing to take limited aggressive actions toward the Baltic States through political, media, intelligence, and cyber efforts. But we could identify no serious discussion of the strategic value of retaking part or all of the Baltic States, either for their intrinsic value or as a way of weakening NATO. This lack of discussion of the Baltics was in sharp contrast to some other former Soviet states, such as Ukraine and Georgia, which represent a much greater focus. Any Russian decision to confront NATO militarily over the Baltics would not appear to come from any existing vein of Russian strategic thinking.
- *Cost sensitivity of current Russian leadership*. Although Russian actions since 2014, and arguably since 2008, have shown an increasing willingness to take calculated risks to achieve strategic goals, these actions have all had very limited military costs. Russian campaigns in Ukraine and Syria exceeded in scope what most analysts would previously have considered likely, but they have remained militarily limited affairs and have targeted adversaries with capabilities clearly inferior to Russia's. Indeed, Russian assistance to rebels in eastern Ukraine appears to have been gradually calibrated to give enough assistance to stave off defeat, but little more. Where Russia has been willing to accept large costs is in the economic realm, where Western sanctions have limited Moscow's ability to cope with and respond to the decline in the price of hydrocarbons, harming the Russian economy. Militarily, however, Russia has yet to risk substantial resources in any of its aggressive actions.
- *Threats to Russian regime stability*. While the evidence suggests that the regime in Moscow is currently stable, there are important long-term trends that may eventually threaten the regime's hold on power. These include, most notably, the country's poor economic performance, the lack of clarity regarding a post-Putin leadership, and the potential for more-virulent nationalists to become a more powerful political force. Declining regime stability has the potential to lead to a more unpredictable Russian foreign policy, resulting from either changes in regime composition or heightened pressures to gain domestic legitimacy through more-aggressive policies.

Policy Implications

Our analysis also highlighted the following implications for U.S. and NATO policymakers:

- *Proposals to enhance deterrence must consider the wider context in which they will be implemented*. The main theme of this report is that Russian reactions to U.S. and NATO posture enhancements may vary considerably depending on the context in which they take place. Policymakers should consider whether the advisability of certain enhancements is dependent on specific conditions that may be subject to change or could help achieve U.S. goals in a wider range of possible futures. Enhancements whose benefits are highly context-dependent should be pursued with greater caution. The key strategic and Russian domestic political factors identified in this report provide a list of potential signposts that analysts can monitor to aid posture enhancement decisions.
- *Enhancement projects should avoid autopilot*. Many posture enhancements require years of lead time to execute properly, so the precise context in which they come to fruition may differ substantially from the context in which they began. There is therefore a danger that projects are completed on "autopilot," which can inadvertently signal aggressive intent under changed circumstances. For example, in May 2016, NATO announced that the missile defense site in Romania had been completed and that ground would soon be broken on a similar site in Poland. At the same time, NATO was floating a separate set of posture enhancement proposals connected with the upcoming Warsaw Summit. The timing helped to undercut U.S. assurances that Russia was not the target of the missile defense systems. Policymakers should consider delaying final completion or announcements of posture enhancements that may take place during times of heightened tension and should routinely reassess posture decisions in the process of being implemented.
- *Systems that could affect strategic stability deserve special scrutiny*. Russia has long maintained that such systems as ballistic missile defense have the potential to affect strategic stability—and are therefore highly threatening. Although Western analysts often point out that these systems lack the technical capabilities to affect a nuclear arsenal as large as Russia's, Russia's concerns appear to be sincerely held. This may be due to fears about the long-term development and scalability of these systems, or it could be due to different perceptions of the current reliability of Russia's second-strike nuclear deterrent or the security of its command and control systems. Given the centrality of Russia's nuclear deterrent to its security, Russia may be willing to run substantial risks to forestall further development of systems that may affect strategic stability. The disconnect between the two sides over the implications of NATO development of these systems thus has the potential to lead to conflict.

Posture and capability enhancements are important tools that the United States and NATO can use to minimize the risk of Russian aggression against NATO members. However, policymakers will need to pay careful attention to the manner in which the enhancements are executed and the context in which they are undertaken in order to maximize their effectiveness and minimize the risk of unwanted Russian reactions.

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Abbreviations

A2/AD	anti-access/area denial
ABCT	armored brigade combat team
BMD	ballistic missile defense
CFE	Conventional Forces in Europe
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
ERI	European Reassurance Initiative
EU	European Union
FLD	full-load displacement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NRF	NATO Response Force
PGS	Prompt Global Strike
RAP	Readiness Action Plan
SPMAGTF	Special-Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force
START II	second Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
VJTF	Very High Readiness Joint Task Force

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The escalation in tensions between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) since 2014 has led to numerous proposals to enhance U.S. and NATO posture on the Alliance's eastern flank. Despite its overall military advantages, NATO faces a clear imbalance in conventional capabilities in regions bordering Russia, such as the Baltics. To address this local imbalance, analysts and policymakers have designed proposals to increase the apparent costs and reduce the probability of success of any attack on a NATO member that Russia might contemplate. Several analysts have assessed the military utility of such proposed enhancements and their likely effect on the outcome of a conventional conflict between Russia and NATO in the region.[1]

Whatever posture enhancements the United States and NATO decide to pursue, their goal is to produce a change in Russian behavior. Therefore, the nature of Russian responses will determine the utility and advisability of whatever actions NATO decides to take. Potential Russian reactions could run the gamut, from tacit acceptance of U.S. and NATO actions and a reduction in any willingness to consider an attack on NATO, to a sharp increase in nearby Russian forces designed to counterbalance NATO's moves, to a precipitous escalation to direct conflict. Russia could also respond to U.S. and NATO military moves by attempting to exploit nonmilitary vulnerabilities in the United States or other NATO countries. Determining the likelihood of potential Russian reactions is therefore a vital component of any analysis regarding which capability and posture enhancements the United States and NATO should pursue. This report develops a framework that analysts can use for this purpose.

To be sure, analysts have failed to predict Russian actions in the past, most notably the 2014 invasion and annexation of Crimea. However, rather than showing the futility of predicting Russian behavior, such failures underline the importance of more-rigorous study and analysis, despite the difficulties involved.

Many existing analyses of the strategic situation in Eastern Europe tend to make strong foundational assumptions regarding Russian motivations and decisionmaking. As a result, in much of the existing policy discussion on Russia and the Baltics, contending camps have often spoken past one another. Many analysts who are relatively more "hawkish" on Russia have warned that Russia has the capabilities to seize and hold the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) with little effective resistance, at least until NATO could build up a massive force

[1] See, for example, David A. Shlapak and Michael Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1253-A, 2016.

to roll back Russian gains.[2] Such a contingency might be politically challenging for NATO, would almost certainly be devastating for the Baltics, and would carry a very high potential for escalation across the nuclear threshold. Seeking to avoid these risks, these hawks generally advocate greater NATO forward posture to deter Russian military incursions into the Baltics. These arguments generally rest on the assumption that Russia perceives NATO's current deterrent in the Baltics to be weak or insufficient, that Russian reactions to substantial U.S. and NATO posture enhancements would not be precipitous, and that Russian leaders—if given the opportunity—would be willing to run tremendous risks for the opportunity to hand NATO a political, and possibly military, defeat.

On the other hand, analysts who are more "dovish" emphasize that even though Russia may have the capabilities to launch such attacks, as indeed it has for some time, it has little incentive to do so.[3] Once NATO concentrates its forces, its military capabilities are much greater than Russia's, so if NATO were to respond militarily to direct Russian aggression, Russia would be left with a choice between devastating conventional defeat or an even more devastating escalation to nuclear confrontation. Even if NATO were not to react militarily, without a major rebound in prices for oil and gas, Russia would leave itself in a potentially catastrophic fiscal situation if the West responded with aggressive economic sanctions. Taking such risks for a prize as peripheral to Russian vital interests as the Baltics would require Russian decisionmakers to accept risk to the point of recklessness—behavior that Russia has not demonstrated at any point in recent history. These arguments generally rest on the assumptions that the incentives of Russian leaders are largely aligned with Russian national interests and that existing U.S. and NATO capabilities and Western political institutions are not perceived as existential threats to the Russian regime.

Building a Framework for Assessing Russian Reactions

While both sides in these debates explore important aspects of the issue, the assumptions they make highlight the importance of conducting a robust analysis of Russian perceptions and decisionmaking. This report aims to do that by focusing on a specific analytical task: How is Russia likely to react to particular U.S. and NATO posture enhancements in Europe? Most centrally, are these enhancements likely to increase or decrease the likelihood of a Russian attack on NATO? Further, do these enhancements have the potential to provoke other Russian reactions short of an attack that still run counter to U.S. or NATO interests?

Before outlining what this report does, it is important to make clear what it does not do. This report does not make recommendations about whether specific potential U.S. or NATO

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[2] See, for example, Heather A. Conley, Kathleen H. Hicks, Lisa Sawyer Samp, Olga Oliker, John O'Grady, Jeffrey Rathke, Melissa Dalton, and Anthony Bell, *Evaluating Future U.S. Army Force Posture in Europe*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2016; Luke Coffey and Daniel Kochis, "The U.S. Needs to Get Its Baltic Force Posture Right," Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, Issue Brief No. 4522, February 29, 2016; and Gustav C. Gressel, "The Future of the Military," in Hiski Haukkala and Nicu Popescu, eds., *Russian Futures: Horizon 2025*, Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, March 2016.

[3] See, for example, Alexander Lukin, "Russia in a Post-Bipolar World," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 58, No. 1, 2016; Clifford Gaddy and Michael O'Hanlon, "Toward a 'Reaganov' Russia: Russian Security Policy After Putin," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 2, Summer 2015; and Mark Galeotti, "Russia Is Only a Threat If We Let It Be One," *National Interest*, July 21, 2016.

posture enhancements are advisable. This report focuses only on one half of the equation: what Russian reactions are likely to be. However, minimizing adverse Russian reactions, such as an escalation to direct conflict, is not the sole goal of U.S. or NATO policy. For example, acquiescing to Russian demands to let Russia define its own sphere of influence and maintain ultimate control of the political destinies of the states that fall within that sphere would likely, at least temporarily, reduce the risk of a Russian attack on bordering states. However, doing so would also run counter to long-standing NATO policy and security commitments, with potentially serious strategic consequences. It could also embolden Russia to expand its goals in the region in ways that further threaten U.S. and NATO strategic interests. The argument of this report is that the likelihood of different possible Russian reactions—including, but not limited to, the likelihood of a Russian attack on a NATO member—need to be carefully assessed when determining NATO posture decisions, not that Russian influence over these decisions should be determinative.

This report is also not designed to make definitive pronouncements about Russian reactions. The report is based entirely on publicly available information and discusses some decisions that may not be made for several years, when important underlying conditions may have changed. Instead, this report develops a framework that analysts can use both now and in the future to assess likely Russian reactions to U.S. and NATO posture enhancements. While the report illustrates how this framework can be applied to specific posture enhancements being considered for Eastern Europe today, we view the primary value of the report to be the framework itself, rather than our own application of it.

Organization of This Report

To develop and illustrate this framework for assessing Russian reactions to NATO posture enhancements, this report undertakes several analytical tasks. In Chapter Two, we briefly summarize existing U.S. and NATO posture in Europe and detail several ongoing or proposed efforts to enhance this posture; we also describe the posture of Russian forces. In Chapter Three, we explore in detail the key factors that are likely to affect Russian reactions, including the strategic context, the Russian domestic context, and the characteristics of the posture enhancements, including how they affect the balance of capabilities between Russia and NATO. In Chapter Four, we demonstrate how these key factors can be used to assess likely Russian reactions to U.S. and NATO posture enhancements, both in the near term (that is, the next one to three years) and further into the future. Chapter Five discusses the policy implications that stem from our analysis. The report also includes two appendixes. Appendix A consists of case studies of notable episodes in the NATO-Russia relationship over the past 20 years, which illustrate those factors that appear to have played key roles in Russian decisionmaking in the past. Appendix B includes an overview summary of key NATO and Russian interactions and points of tension since 1995.

CHAPTER TWO

Current, Planned, and Proposed Postures in Europe

Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and its subsequent intervention in eastern Ukraine have prompted analysts and policymakers to put forward many proposals to modify NATO's posture, particularly the posture of U.S. forces, to strengthen deterrence for European NATO members. This chapter summarizes several of the most prominent of these proposals. It also places these proposals in context by briefly surveying current Russian posture and capabilities and historical and current NATO posture in Europe.[1] Assessing the size, location, and capabilities of posture enhancements may play a role in determining Russian reactions, along with other factors that will be discussed in Chapter Three. A detailed analysis of the proposed posture enhancements' effects on the balance of forces in specific conflict scenarios is beyond the scope of this study.[2] However, gaining a rough understanding of the size and scope of these enhancements relative to current Russian, NATO, and U.S. forces can help provide important context for our analysis.

NATO Posture in Europe and Overall Capabilities

Historic Posture

NATO posture has evolved significantly since the Alliance's formation in 1949. During the Cold War, the size and placement of NATO forces were largely driven by estimates of the balance of conventional military forces between NATO and the Warsaw Pact in Europe. Those estimates shifted throughout the Cold War and were often the subject of vigorous debate.[3] Overall, however, the Soviet Union and its allies enjoyed a quantitative edge over the West in personnel and conventional arms. The concept of massive retaliation, adopted by NATO in the 1950s, was largely a response to this development. This strategy sought to offset the conventional disparity by responding to a Soviet assault with overwhelming force in the form of a U.S.-led nuclear attack. However, as the Cold War progressed and the Soviet Union developed a formidable nuclear arsenal of its own, doubts grew about the credibility of NATO's willingness to respond to a conventional attack with nuclear weapons. In the 1960s, the "flex-

[1] In doing so, to provide an overall, aggregate picture, the forces attributed to NATO throughout this chapter include all those fielded by NATO members, regardless of whether the forces are currently under national control or assigned specifically to NATO.

[2] For a recent example of such an assessment, see Shlapak and Johnson, 2016.

[3] See, for example, Richard Bitzinger, *Assessing the Conventional Balance in Europe, 1945–1975*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, N-2859-FF/RC, 1989, p. v.

ible response" strategy took precedence; in that strategy, NATO would maintain a wider suite of deterrence options along a continuum of force, from conventional formations to nuclear weapons. NATO's conventional deterrent now had the larger role of preventing a Warsaw Pact assault into the members of the Alliance. To achieve this goal, and in deference to political considerations, most of NATO's forces in the Central Region were positioned close to the inter-German border in a forward defense posture. Befitting the increased importance placed on the conventional deterrent, NATO forces grew substantially from the adoption of flexible response until the end of the Cold War.[4] However, NATO forces still fell short of their Soviet rivals: In the mid-1980s, Warsaw Pact militaries could field 6 million troops compared with NATO's 4.5 million and maintained larger quantities of most categories of military equipment.[5]

Although NATO forces during the later Cold War period were postured with the goal of denying the Soviet Union the ability to achieve a rapid conquest of vital allies, such as West Germany, not all NATO territory could plausibly be defended in this manner. West Berlin, to take the most extreme example, was never militarily defensible in its own right, and to deter Soviet aggression against the city, NATO relied on threats to escalate any conflict there to a wider war with unacceptable costs.[6]

Large conventional NATO forces persisted in Western Europe until the end of the Cold War, when they were deemed unnecessary. With the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, NATO began to rely less on forward-deployed main defense forces and more on rapid reaction forces and augmentation forces.[7] New responsibilities, such as crisis management, bilateral military engagement, and conflict prevention, were viewed as increasingly important Alliance tasks in the post–Cold War environment.[8] Collective defense remained NATO's foundational mission, but that mission was now accomplished through "defense in depth" rather than forward deployments.

Current Posture

Currently, even after dramatic post–Cold War NATO force reductions, the conventional military balance is now decidedly in NATO's favor. Although the size of forces needs to be considered alongside other factors, such as readiness levels, the Alliance does have a significant advantage in military personnel over the Russian Federation. Overall, NATO's 28 members field 3.4 million active military personnel, although this figure includes many U.S. forces stationed in other regions.[9] This force, in aggregate, far outstrips that of Russia's 800,000-strong

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4 Richard L. Kugler, *NATO's Future Conventional Defense Strategy in Central Europe: Theater Employment Doctrine for the Post–Cold War Era*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, R-4084-A, 1992b.

5 NATO, *NATO and the Warsaw Pact: Force Comparisons*, Brussels, Public Diplomacy Division, 1984, p. 8.

6 While the U.S. and NATO insistence on defending West Berlin did lead to numerous crises during the early Cold War period, the situation later stabilized following the construction of the Berlin Wall. See, for example, Richard K. Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1987, pp. 83–92; and Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, New York: Penguin Group, 2005, pp. 252–254.

7 Celeste A. Wallander, "Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO After the Cold War," *International Organization*, Vol. 54, No. 4, Autumn 2000, p. 718

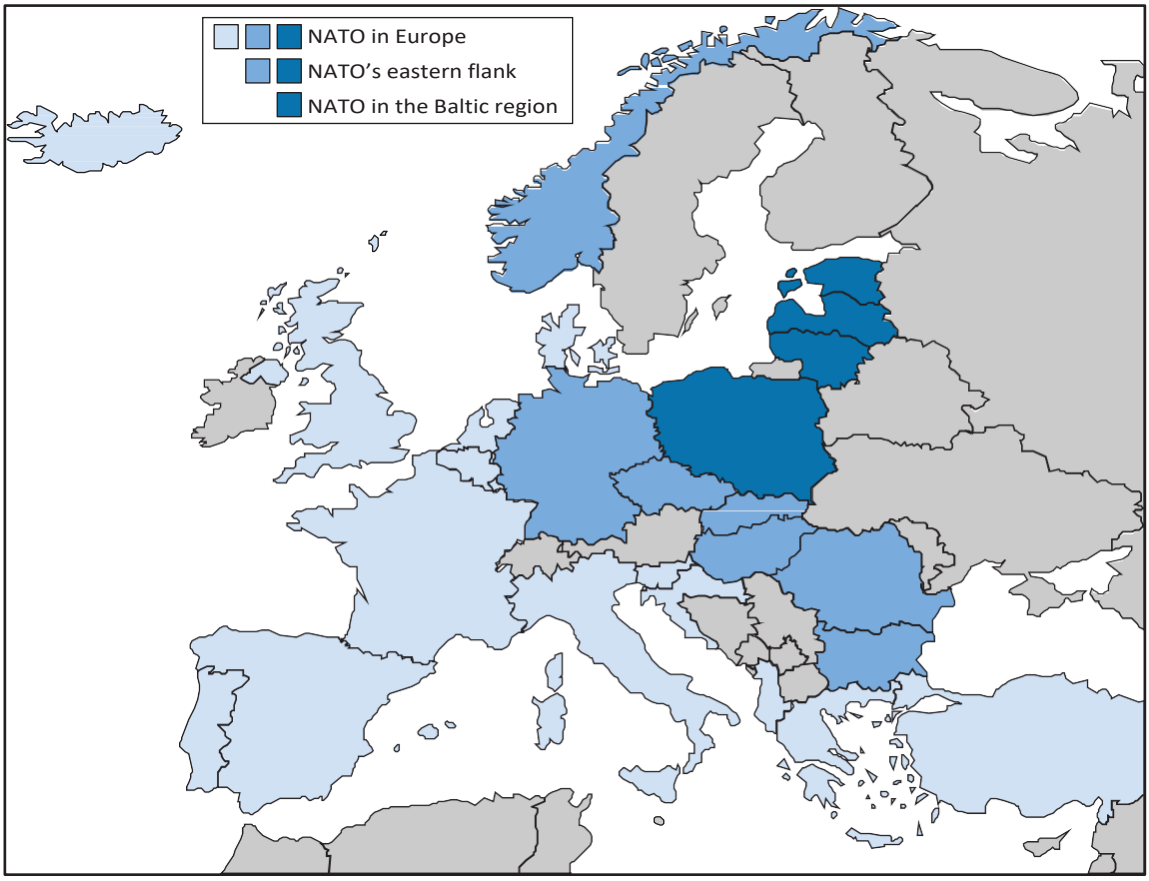
8 William T. Johnson, *NATO Strategy in the 1990s: Reaping the Peace Dividend or the Whirlwind?* Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1995, p. 4

9 NATO, "Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2008–2015)," press release, Brussels, January 28, 2016a, p. 8.

military.[10] However, the situation facing those members of NATO most vulnerable to possible Russian aggression reveals a different pattern. The map in Figure 2.1 divides European NATO members geographically for the purpose of the analysis in this chapter. All of the blue-shaded countries on the map indicate NATO members in Europe. Those on the Alliance's eastern flank, geographically closer to Russian territory, are shown in the two darker shades of blue, with the darkest shade indicating NATO members in the Baltic region.

Although NATO's total military manpower is 3.4 million active personnel, the total military manpower of NATO's eastern-flank members is about half a million active personnel. Furthermore, when focusing only on the NATO members in the Baltic region, the total falls even further, to roughly 126,000 personnel, most of whom are in the Polish armed forces.[11] Although most Russian forces are not deployed in close proximity to the Baltic region and Rus-

Figure 2.1
NATO Members, by Region



NOTE: NATO's *eastern flank* includes Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. The *Baltic region* includes Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.

RAND *RR1879-2.1*

[10] International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, Vol. 116, No. 1, February 2016, p. 189.

[11] NATO, 2016a, p. 8.

sian forces rely on limited numbers of rail lines to move domestically, NATO forces in such states as Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania still face a clear conventional military imbalance.

We see a similar pattern when examining military power in terms of major combat units. As Tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 demonstrate, although the entire Alliance possesses a formidable force, the areas perhaps most at risk are host to only a small fraction of NATO's overall capabilities. That is, most NATO forces are not deployed in Eastern Europe and would be hard pressed to quickly reach a beleaguered member state in the event of a short-warning Russian attack. Therefore, although Russia is at a significant disadvantage when compared with overall NATO military power, that disadvantage does not persist—and in fact reverses—when considering the balance of forces only in certain areas of Eastern Europe, such as the Baltic region.[12]

As Table 2.1 indicates, NATO forces in Europe include substantial ground forces across a range of capabilities.[13] However, most of these forces are located outside of Eastern Europe, except for the few in the Baltic region. Within the Baltic region, Poland accounts for the vast majority of NATO-member ground forces, because Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have limited military capabilities.

NATO-member air assets in Europe also remain substantial, as shown in Table 2.2. While most of these assets are based in Western Europe, their utility to defend NATO members in Eastern Europe is, of course, not affected by distance in the same way that ground forces are.

NATO-member naval forces remain heavily present in Europe as well, as shown in Table 2.3, although, once again, very few of these assets are based in the Baltic region.

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[12] Edward Lucas and A. Wess Mitchell, *Central European Security After Crimea: The Case for Strengthening NATO's Eastern Defences*, Washington, D.C.: Center for European Policy Analysis, Report No. 35, March 25, 2014, pp. 2–3.

[13] While precise sizes vary from country to country, and indeed from unit to unit, the approximate number of personnel in each ground unit in Tables 2.1, 2.4, and 2.5 are as follows:

- battalion: 500–1,000
- brigade: 3,000–5,000
- division: 15,000–20,000

See International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016, p. 496.

Table 2.1
NATO-Member Ground Forces, by Location and Type, 2015

Category	Armored	Mechanized	Light	Artillery	Air Defense
NATO	• 35 brigades	• 4 battalions • 1 regiment • 82 brigades • 2 divisions	• 7 battalions • 3 regiments • 67 brigades • 6 divisions	• 135 battalions • 1 mixed artillery/air defense battalion • 33 regiments • 11 brigades	• 1 mixed artillery/air defense battalion • 36 battalions • 17 regiments • 6 brigades
NATO in Europe	• 26 brigades	• 4 battalions • 1 regiment • 71 brigades • 2 divisions	• 7 battalions • 3 regiments • 54 brigades • 3 divisions • 1 Marine Corps SPMAGTF	• 96 battalions • 1 mixed artillery/air defense battalion • 30 regiments • 4 brigades	• 1 mixed artillery/air defense battalion • 34 battalions • 16 regiments • 1 brigade
NATO's eastern flank	• 6 brigades	• 1 battalion • 22 brigades	• 3 battalions • 12 brigades • 1 Marine Corps SPMAGTF	• 28 battalions • 8 regiments	• 24 battalions • 7 regiments • 1 brigade • Aegis Ashore Missile System
NATO in the Baltic region	• 4 brigades	• 1 battalion • 7 brigades	• 3 battalions • 5 brigades • 1 Marine Corps SPMAGTF	• 17 battalions • 3 regiments	• 1 brigade • 3 regiments • 12 battalions

SOURCES: IHS Markit, *Jane's World Armies*, London, 2016b.

NOTE: NATO subset categories include U.S. forces stationed in Europe. SPMAGTF = Special-Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force.

Table 2.2
NATO-Member Air Forces, by Location and Type, 2015

Category	Combat Aviation	Logistics Aviation	Rotary Aviation
NATO	• 201 squadrons	• 259 squadrons • 1 battalion • 2 groups	• 9 battalions • 13 regiments • 2 brigades • 100 squadrons • 12 U.S. combat aviation brigades
NATO in Europe	• 99 squadrons	• 72 squadrons • 1 battalion • 2 groups	• 9 battalions • 13 regiments • 2 brigades • 44 squadrons • 1 U.S. combat aviation brigade
NATO's eastern flank	• 32 squadrons	• 22 squadrons	• 24 squadrons • 3 regiments • 1 U.S. combat aviation brigade • 1 air cavalry brigade
NATO in the Baltic region	• 13 squadrons	• 5 squadrons	• 3 squadrons • 1 air cavalry brigade • 1 U.S. combat aviation brigade

SOURCES: IHS Markit, *Jane's World Air Forces*, London, 2016a; International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016.

Table 2.3
NATO-Member Naval Forces, by Location and Type, 2015

Category	Principal Surface Combatants[a]	Patrol and Coastal Combatants	Carriers and Amphibious Vessels	Submarines
NATO	263	297	117	149
NATO in Europe	152	274	77	74
NATO's eastern flank	29	48	10	16
NATO in the Baltic region	2	0	8	5

SOURCES: For patrol coastal combatants, carriers and amphibious vehicles, and submarines, see IHS Markit, *Jane's World Navies*, London, 2016c; for principal surface combatants, see International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016.

[a] We define *principal surface combatants* using the definition from *The Military Balance*: "all surface ships designed for combat operations on the high seas, with an FLD [full-load displacement] above 1,500 tonnes. Aircraft carriers, including helicopter carriers, are vessels with a flat deck primarily designed to carry fixed- and/or rotary-wing aircraft, without amphibious capability. Other principal surface combatants include cruisers (with an FLD above 9,750 tonnes), destroyers (with an FLD above 4,500 tonnes) and frigates (with an FLD above 1,500 tonnes)" (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016, p. 498).

U.S. Posture in Europe and Overall Capabilities

In addition to looking at the balance of NATO-member forces, it is instructive to look separately at U.S. military posture in Europe. The United States is the largest, most militarily capable actor in NATO, and most of the proposed enhancements discussed in this section focus heavily on changes to U.S. posture rather than changes to the posture of NATO European allies. Further, for many allies, such as Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the alliance with the United States specifically is seen as the ultimate guarantee of their security, over and above the broader NATO alliance.

Historic Posture

The United States has maintained a substantial military presence in Europe since the end of World War II. Initially, that presence was relatively small, focused more on postwar occupation duties than on the defense of Europe. By the early 1950s, the U.S. mission had changed. U.S. policymakers had become alarmed at the threat posed by the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc, a threat that had manifested itself in the Berlin Blockade and the Korean War. Growing Soviet military conventional and then nuclear capabilities provided the impetus for the United States to shift its role from postwar occupier to guarantor of European security.[14] Once the need for a large U.S. presence in Europe was recognized, U.S. defense policy became intrinsically linked with that of NATO, which relied heavily on U.S. involvement. U.S. forces deployed in Europe peaked at 450,000 in the mid-1950s and hovered around 300,000 throughout the Cold War.[15]

With the end of the Cold War, the U.S. military presence fell significantly. Its military personnel in Europe dropped to around 120,000 in the 1990s. The decline has continued to the present, with 65,000 U.S. troops on the continent in 2015.[16] The latest downsizing in Europe began in 2012 in the midst of budget constraints and changing foreign policy priorities. Europe at that time was seen as a relatively secure region that could afford the reductions in strength.[17] U.S. European Command by 2014 lost two infantry brigade combat teams and two Air Force squadrons to this drawdown.[18]

Current Posture

A summary of U.S. forces currently in Europe is shown in Table 2.4. As of early 2016, there were two U.S. Army brigades in Europe on a permanent basis: the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vicenza, Italy, and the 2nd Cavalry Regiment (organized as a Stryker brigade combat team) in Vilseck, Germany. Other notable units include the 10th Army Air and Missile Defense Command and the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade.[19] Some heavy equipment was left behind in Europe in the form of the Army's European Activity Set to offset the withdrawal of two brigade combat teams, but this prepositioned materiel is only capable of filling out one battalion's complement of armored vehicles.[20] The potential for a return of heavy U.S. forces to Europe is at the center of many current proposals and policy initiatives.

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[14] Donald A Carter, *Forging the Shield: The U.S. Army in Europe, 1951–1962*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 2015, pp. 12–15.

[15] Dakota L. Wood, ed., "Assessing the Global Operating Environment: Europe," in *2016 Index of U.S. Military Strength*, Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, 2016, p. 86; and Richard L. Kugler, *The Future U.S. Military Presence in Europe: Forces and Requirements for the Post–Cold War Era*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, R-4194-EUCOM/NA, 1992a, pp. 18–19.

[16] Wood, 2016, p. 86.

[17] Taft R. Blackburn, *The Drawdown in Europe: What Does It Mean?* Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, April 30, 2014, pp. 2–8.

[18] Justin A. Brown, *Back to the Balance – The U.S. Security Relationship with Europe in the Twenty-First Century: U.S. Force Posture, European Military Capability, Russian Resurgence, and Public Opinion*, thesis, St. Louis, Mo.: Washington University in St. Louis, 2015, pp. 12–13.

[19] U.S. Army Europe, "Units and Commands," web page, undated.

[20] Michelle Tan, "Army Expands Operation Atlantic Resolve to Six Countries," *Army Times*, February 20, 2015.

Table 2.4
U.S. Forces in Europe, 2015

Army	Navy/Marine Corps	Air Force
• 1 Stryker brigade combat team • 1 airborne brigade combat team • 1 air defense command • 1 combat aviation brigade	• 4 destroyers • 1 command vessel • 1 SPMAGTF	• 6 combat squadrons • 2 logistics squadrons

SOURCES: Wood, 2016; U.S. Army Europe, undated; U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/6th Fleet, "Aegis Ashore Missile Defense System (AAMDS)—Romania Operationally Certified," May 16, 2016; and U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Air Forces Africa, "Units," web page, undated.

The U.S. Navy's 6th Fleet is responsible for naval operations in Europe. Four *Arleigh Burke*–class guided missile destroyers and the USS *Mount Whitney* command ship form the core of Naval Forces Europe.[21] Equipped with the Aegis missile defense system, the four destroyers—and a recently activated land-based Aegis system—are key elements in the European Phased Adaptive Approach, the U.S.-led NATO missile defense program.[22] The Marine Corps' most significant contribution comes in the form of a 1,500-strong SPMAGTF.[23]

Several combat and logistics aviation squadrons are based in Europe under the umbrella of U.S. Air Forces Europe. Seven major bases in Italy, Turkey, Germany, and the United Kingdom are home to fighter, transport, and logistics squadrons.[24]

Russian Posture and Overall Capabilities

While Russia, of course, has the ability to move forces within its own territory—a capability it demonstrates during periodic large-scale exercises—such movements also require time and are generally visible to NATO observers.[25] It is therefore still useful to identify which Russian units are based in which geographic locations. At the broadest level, Russia is divided into five geographic regions for military purposes, including four military districts and a separate Arctic Joint Strategic Command, as shown in Figure 2.2. Forces in the Western Military District are most salient for considerations of a short-warning scenario involving states in the Baltic region, although forces in the Southern Military District may be more relevant for scenarios involving Romania, Bulgaria, or Turkey, and forces in the Central Military District are also often activated for exercises.

As noted earlier, current Russian forces are substantially fewer in number than the aggregate forces that NATO can bring to bear—3.4 million NATO active military personnel versus roughly 800,000 active Russian military personnel. Table 2.5 provides details on the local distribution of Russia's capabilities by showing the Russian military units based in the relevant

[21] Wood, 2016, p. 87.

[22] U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/6th Fleet, 2016.

[23] Wood, 2016, p. 90.

[24] U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Air Forces Africa, undated.

[25] Indeed, these exercises may be conducted, in part, to habituate NATO observers to large-scale Russian troop movements, complicating any attempt to identify movements that may be the precursor to a Russian attack on one of its neighbors.

Figure 2.2
Russian Military Districts

SOURCE: Alex Welens, "Areas of Responsibility of the 5 Operational Strategic Commands of the Russian Armed Forces Since Dec 15th, 2014," July 15, 2016.
RAND *RR1879-2.2*

military districts and the Arctic Joint Strategic Command. From Table 2.5, one can see that Russia fields roughly three divisions and 47 brigades of mechanized forces (the shaded bottom row). As shown in Table 2.1, NATO mechanized forces just in Europe include two divisions and 71 brigades. Imbalances in numbers of air and naval forces are generally more dramatic, with Russia's 18 regiments and eight squadrons of combat aviation (shown in the shaded row in Table 2.5) exceeded by the 99 NATO combat aviation squadrons in Europe alone (Tables 2.2 and 2.3).

While a detailed comparison of Tables 2.1, 2.2., 2.3, and 2.5 shows that there is an imbalance, this can perhaps more easily be seen in Table 2.6, which shows in a broad-brush way how NATO and Russian forces compare. In terms of active forces, reserve forces, main battle tanks, combat aircraft, and principal surface combatants, NATO has far more capabilities. However, relatively few of these forces belong to NATO members nearest the Russian border. In the event of a potential conflict in the Baltic region or in other locations in Eastern Europe, NATO may at least initially face a local balance of capabilities that is strongly in favor of Russia. NATO's current posture therefore implies that in the event of a short-warning, concerted attack from Russia on, for example, the Baltic States, the Alliance may be unable to bring sufficient combat power to bear to defeat or substantially delay the offensive.[26]

[26] For a summary assessment of the military balance between Russia and NATO in the Baltics, see Shlapak and Johnson, 2016.

Table 2.5
Russian Forces, by Military District and Type, 2015

	Ground Forces	Naval Forces	Air Forces
Western Military District and Arctic Joint Strategic Command	• 1 tank division • 1 tank brigade • 1 mechanized division • 9 mechanized brigades • 1 mechanized regiment • 3 airborne divisions • 2 naval infantry brigades • 4 artillery brigades • 3 missile brigades • 2 anti-ship missile brigades	• 35 submarines • 19 principal surface combatants • 17 amphibious vessels • 12 mine warfare vessels • 23 patrol and coastal combatants	• 5 combat aviation regiments • 1 combat aviation squadron • 1 transport/logistics squadron • 1 transport/logistics regiment • 1 rotary brigade • 6 rotary squadrons
Central Military District	• 1 tank brigade • 1 motorized rifle division • 11 motorized rifle brigades • 1 airborne brigade • 3 artillery brigades • 3 missile brigades • 2 air defense brigades • 6 air defense regiments		• 5 combat aviation squadrons • 1 combat aviation regiment • 1 transport/logistics regiment • 4 rotary squadrons
Southern Military District	• 9 mechanized brigades • 1 airborne division • 2 naval infantry brigades • 1 air assault brigade • 3 light/mountain motorized rifle brigades • 3 artillery brigades • 1 artillery regiment • 1 missile brigade • 2 anti-ship missile brigades • 2 air defense brigades • 6 air defense regiments	• 5 submarines • 5 principal surface combatants • 10 amphibious vessels • 10 mine warfare vessels • 22 patrol and coastal combatants	• 7 combat aviation regiments • 1 combat aviation squadron • 1 transport/logistics regiment • 11 rotary squadrons
Eastern Military District	• 1 tank brigade • 1 mechanized division • 18 mechanized brigades • 2 airborne brigades • 2 naval infantry brigades • 4 artillery brigades • 3 missile brigades • 2 anti-ship missile brigades • 3 air defense brigades • 8 air defense regiments	• 24 submarines • 9 principal surface combatants • 9 amphibious vessels • 8 mine warfare vessels • 23 patrol and coastal combatants	• 5 combat aviation regiments • 1 combat aviation squadron • 4 transport/logistics squadrons • 9 rotary squadrons
Total	• 1 tank division • 3 tank brigades • 3 mechanized divisions • 47 mechanized brigades • 1 mechanized regiment • 4 airborne divisions • 13 light /naval/airborne brigades • 14 artillery brigades • 10 missile brigades • 6 anti-ship missile brigades • 9 air defense brigades • 29 air defense regiments	• 64 submarines • 33 principal surface combatants • 36 amphibious vessels • 30 mine warfare vessels • 68 patrol and coastal combatants	• 18 combat aviation regiments • 8 combat aviation squadrons • 3 transport/logistics squadrons • 5 transport/logistics regiments • 1 rotary brigade • 30 rotary squadrons

SOURCE: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016.

NOTE: Naval forces for the Southern Military District only include Black Sea Fleet; a Russian aviation regiment is composed of multiple squadrons and typically consists of between 24 and 60 aircraft, depending on the type of aircraft (for example, fighter, bomber, reconnaissance) (see Benjamin S. Lambeth, *The Continuing Crisis of Russian Air Power*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, P-8053, 2001, p. 3; Gareth Jennings, "Russian Air Force Takes Delivery of First Su-35 Fighters," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, December 28, 2012; and Craig Caffrey, "After Bearing

Table 2.5—Continued

the Strain, Russian Air Force Looks Towards a Brighter Future," *Jane's International Defence Review*, April 6, 2008); a Russian air defense regiment consists of two battalions, each equipped with eight launchers (typically S-300 or S-400) for a total of 16 for the regiment (see "Istochnik Minoborony RF v dekabre vpervye poluchit S trekhdivizionnogo sostava [The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation Will for the First Time Receive S-400s in a Three-Division Composition]," TASS, November 19, 2014); a Russian aviation squadron typically consists of 12 aircraft (Karl Soper, "Russia Receives Two MiG-31BM Squadrons," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, April 10, 2015; and Anton Balagin, "Voronezhskaya aviabaza prinyala tri novykh Su-34 [Voronezh Airbase Received 3 New Su-34s]," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, July 9, 2013).

Table 2.6
NATO and Russian Force Comparison, 2015

Category	Active Forces	Reserve Forces	Main Battle Tanks	Combat Aircraft	Principal Surface Combatants
NATO	3,405,660	2,412,990	9,421	5,597	263
NATO in Europe	1,958,410	1,541,640	6,917	2,519	152
NATO's eastern flank	494,760	519,190	1,939	609	29
NATO in the Baltic region	126,760	44,550	974	98	2
Russia	798,000	2,000,000	2,950	1,276	35

SOURCE: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016.

NOTE: European NATO Member figures count only forces from European members, and exclude U.S. forces stationed in Europe.

To be clear, Table 2.6's comparison is not an assessment of the relative capabilities of NATO and Russian forces in Europe. Even similarly sized units may have radically different effective capabilities because of differences in technological sophistication, training, or readiness. However, this broad-brush comparison does help provide a sense of the scale of existing NATO, U.S., and Russian forces and the imbalances they reveal as we assess the planned posture initiatives taken and the proposed enhancements to NATO posture discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Planned Posture Initiatives

With the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) and the decisions taken at the Warsaw Summit in July 2016, the Alliance is taking steps to rectify this apparent local imbalance in capabilities. Nevertheless, this situation is naturally concerning to frontline Eastern European states in the wake of Russian aggression against Ukraine.[27] Many such states, including particularly Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, possess very little space to trade for time and therefore face the prospect of needing to have all or most of their territory retaken in a NATO counterattack.[28] The planned posture initiatives are summarized in Table 2.7, in the chronological order in which they began, and then discussed in more detail in the paragraphs that follow.

[27] Matthew Kroenig, "Facing Reality: Getting NATO Ready for a New Cold War," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 57, No. 1, February–March 2015, p. 61.

[28] "NATO: The Evolution of the Alliance," Stratfor, April 28, 2014.

Table 2.7
Summary of Planned NATO Posture Initiatives

Planned Initiative	Additional Forces
ERI	• 1 rotationally-based armored brigade combat team (ABCT)
2014 NATO Wales Summit and the Readiness Action Plan (RAP)	• Increased size of NATO Response Force (NRF) • Creation of Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) • NATO Force Integration Units
2016 NATO Warsaw Summit	• 4 battalion-sized battle groups provided by Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States • 1 multinational divisional headquarters built on existing Polish headquarters • 1 multinational framework brigade built on Romania formation

European Reassurance Initiative

In June 2014, U.S. President Barack Obama announced the ERI, a billion-dollar program aimed at augmenting defenses and strengthening partnerships both with NATO allies and with non-NATO, post-Soviet states (such as Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia).[29] The ERI supports five main efforts: increased presence of U.S. forces in Europe, additional bilateral and multilateral exercises, improved infrastructure, enhanced prepositioning, and building partner capacity.[30] Funding for the ERI was first requested for the U.S. government's 2015 fiscal year, with subsequent requests introducing additional programs.

Perhaps most notably with regard to force posture, the ERI provides for the presence of an ABCT in Eastern Europe with "heel-to-toe rotations of armored forces coupled with assigned light and Stryker forces, ensuring a continuous U.S. presence in the Baltic States and Poland as well as periodic presence in Romania and Bulgaria."[31] The ERI has also funded Army Prepositioned Stocks (APS; equipment stockpiles deployed ahead of U.S. troops in potential conflict areas) in Europe that could equip additional U.S. forces, including a fires brigade.[32]

Other components of the ERI support intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance programs; joint U.S.-NATO exercises; training; and enhancements to defense infrastructure, such as air bases and ranges. The ERI has grown since its first iteration in 2015; for fiscal year 2017, the initiative provides $3.4 billion and a number of new programs aimed at strengthening deterrence.[33] Mark F. Cancian and Lisa Sawyer Samp of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) view the ERI's evolution as reflective of a new U.S. Department of Defense emphasis on European security, with its latest version the "first year of a multiyear plan."[34] The ERI is now being implemented through Operation Atlantic Resolve, a Defense Department–wide effort launched in 2014. Under the operation, each U.S. military branch has

[29] White House, "Remarks by President Obama and President Komorowski of Poland in a Joint Press Conference," Washington, D.C., June 3, 2014b.

[30] Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), "European Reassurance Initiative, Department of Defense Budget Fiscal Year (FY) 2016," Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, February 2015, p. 2.

[31] Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), "European Reassurance Initiative, Department of Defense Budget Fiscal Year (FY) 2017," Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, February 2016, p. 2.

[32] Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), 2016, p. 16.

[33] Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), 2016, p. 1.

[34] Mark F. Cancian and Lisa Sawyer Samp, "The European Reassurance Initiative," Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 9, 2016.

conducted a series of training exercises and rotational deployments designed to demonstrate the U.S. commitment to the NATO alliance. An open-ended operation, Atlantic Resolve will run as long as the current European security situation dictates.[35]

2014 NATO Wales Summit and the Readiness Action Plan

In September 2014, a few months after President Obama's announcement of the ERI, the wider NATO alliance adopted a complementary set of measures.[36] At the NATO Summit in Newport, Wales, the Alliance's RAP was inaugurated. The Wales Summit declaration describes the RAP as "a coherent and comprehensive package of necessary measures to respond to the changes in the security environment on NATO's borders. . . . It responds to the challenges posed by Russia and their strategic implications."[37] Although the Wales Summit and the RAP addressed other security issues, elevated tensions on NATO's eastern flank and the mission of collective defense were perhaps the most prominent topics addressed.[38]

The RAP's initiatives were divided into two categories: assurance measures and adaptation measures. The former primarily cover air patrols, maritime surveillance missions, training, and military exercises. The RAP's adaptation measures, meanwhile, seek to bolster NATO force structure and improve the Alliance's ability to respond to security threats. In particular, the NRF was increased in size and capability.[39] The NRF is not a new formation—it was first established in 2002—but it received new attention in the wake of the Wales Summit and the adoption of the RAP.[40] Multiple NATO members contribute naval, land, air, and special operations forces to the NRF on a rotational basis, with the goal of maintaining a force capable of promptly reacting to emerging security challenges. Before the Wales Summit, 13,000 NATO personnel fell within the NRF, but the RAP emphasized increasing that number.[41] What NATO refers to as the "enhanced NRF" will eventually number close to 40,000 troops with three brigades: one forming a VJTF and the other two comprising the Initial Follow-On Forces Group. One of the RAP's more prominent innovations, the VJTF is designed to be prepared to deploy forces to threatened areas within two to three days.[42] The NATO exercise Trident Juncture, held in October and November 2015, served as a proof of concept for the VJTF; at its conclusion, the force's readiness for operations was certified by NATO.[43]

A new command and control apparatus for NATO was also implemented under the auspices of the RAP. NATO Force Integration Units were stood up in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and the Baltic States.[44] The units comprise small headquarters staffs and function as coordination nodes between NATO forces during exercises or deployments. In particular, the units

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35 U.S. European Command, "Operation Atlantic Resolve—Fact Sheet 2016," April 15, 2016, p. 1.

36 NATO, "Wales Summit Declaration," press release, Brussels, September 5, 2014.

37 NATO, "NATO's Readiness Action Plan: Fact Sheet," Brussels, October 2015c, p. 1.

38 Douglas Lute, "From Wales to Warsaw: NATO's Readiness Action Plan," *Ambassadors Review*, Spring 2015.

39 NATO, 2015c, p. 2.

40 NATO, "NATO Response Force," web page, Brussels, May 11, 2015b.

41 NATO, 2015c, p. 2.

42 NATO, 2015b.

43 International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016, pp. 55–57.

44 International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016.

handle logistic and infrastructure questions, facilitating the arrival of necessary reinforcements during NATO operations.[45]

2016 NATO Warsaw Summit

By 2016, through consistent implementation of most initiatives proposed at the Wales Summit, NATO had demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring the collective defense of its members.[46] However, the Wales RAP was not envisioned to adequately address deterrence. In particular, the new VJTF was unlikely to have any marked impact in the case of a Russian invasion, given the task force's small size.[47] In addition, high-level NATO commanders believed that the VJTF would be too slow to deploy to the Baltics in a defensive scenario and too vulnerable to hostile forces upon its arrival.[48] Accordingly, NATO's easternmost members lobbied for more-robust posture improvements than those unveiled in Wales. More than a year prior to the Warsaw Summit, Polish President Andrej Duda called for NATO bases in Eastern Europe as part of a more permanent Alliance presence in the region.[49] More recently, in May 2016, Polish government officials reiterated their intention to push for permanent stationing of forces during the summit.[50] In addition, Lieutenant General Riho Terras, the Estonian military's commander in chief, has called for the deployment of U.S. Patriot missile systems to protect the Baltic States.[51] The need for further initiatives was also recognized by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, who commented following a February 2016 NATO meeting that a decision had been made to "deploy a significant number of troops into Eastern Europe."[52]

The Warsaw Summit, held on July 8 and 9, 2016, committed NATO members to take several additional steps.[53] NATO agreed to create "an enhanced forward presence" on its eastern flank by way of rotational deployments of multinational formations. Beginning in 2017, four battalion-sized units, led by Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States, will be deployed to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, respectively. In addition, Poland will repurpose one of its divisional headquarters to act as the headquarters of a multinational division. Further, a multinational framework brigade will be created in Romania using an existing Romanian brigade as a foundation.[54]

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[45] Lute, 2015.

[46] Karl-Heinz Kamp, "The Agenda of the NATO Summit in Warsaw," Federal Academy for Security Policy, Security Policy Working Paper No. 9, 2015, p. 1.

[47] Luke Coffey and Daniel Kochis, "The Baltic States: The United States Must Be Prepared to Fulfill Its NATO Treaty Obligations," Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, Backgrounder No. 3039, September 29, 2015.

[48] Sam Jones, "NATO Rapid Unit Not Fit for Eastern Europe Deployment, Say Generals," Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council, May 15, 2016a.

[49] "New Polish President Makes NATO Bases in Central Europe a Priority for Warsaw Summit," *Guardian*, Associated Press, and *Irish Times*, August 6, 2015.

[50] Esteban Villarejo, "NATO Urged to Have Military Presence on Eastern Flank," *Defense News*, May 17, 2016.

[51] Sam Jones, "Estonia Calls for Patriot Shield to Deter Russia in Baltic Region," Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council, May 26, 2016b.

[52] Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "NATO Says It's Adding a Significant Number of Troops in Eastern Europe," *Washington Post*, February 10, 2016.

[53] White House, "Fact Sheet: NATO Warsaw Summit," Washington, D.C., July 8, 2016b; NATO, "Warsaw Summit Communiqué," press release, Brussels, July 8, 2016b.

[54] NATO, 2016b.

Posture Enhancement Proposals

As the United States and NATO unveiled the planned posture enhancements discussed in this chapter, Western policy and defense analysts have attempted to come to terms with the problem of deterrence on the Alliance's eastern border and in the Baltic States in particular. Deterring a major land power in Europe became a topic of intense study and debate for the first time since the Cold War and has led to numerous proposals on additional posture enhancements that NATO should take; the most prominent of these proposals are summarized in Table 2.8 and discussed in this section. Many of these proposals include recommendations that would take many years longer to implement than the posture enhancements currently under way. For this reason, we assess potential Russian reactions to these proposals further into the future and in our analysis in Chapter Four.

Table 2.8
Posture Enhancement Proposals

Proposal	Additional Proposed Forces
RAND Corporation (2016)[a]	• 3 heavy brigades • Air, artillery, and other supporting elements also recommended
RAND Corporation (2015)[b]	• 3–4 heavy brigades • Air and missile defense forces recommended, along with additional supporting elements
CSIS[c]	• 2 rotationally-based ABCTs • 1,000 headquarters staff
Atlantic Council[d]	• Baltic States' own forces upgraded to heavy brigades; 1 heavy brigade per Baltic State • Additional anti-tank and air defense weaponry acquired by the Baltic States • 3 multinational (U.S./European/Baltic) battalions; 1 battalion per Baltic State • 3 rotationally-based, forward-deployed heavy brigades from NATO countries (analogous to ERI's ABCT; one brigade each from the United Kingdom, Germany, and Poland) • Additional supporting units supplied by the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway
Army War College[e]	• 1 rotationally-deployed ABCT • Headquarters with a two-star command

[a] Shlapak and Johnson, 2016. This proposal recommends six or seven brigades on the ground at the start of hostilities, including both new heavy brigades and forces already in Europe; lighter and more-mobile forces need not be forward deployed, but heavier forces should be stationed close to or in Baltic States.

[b] David Ochmanek, Scott Boston, Burgess Laird, and Forrest E. Morgan, *Securing NATO's Eastern Flank: An Assessment of the Allies' Capabilities and Posture in 2020*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2017, not available to the general public. In this proposal based on research conducted in 2015, brigades can be rotationally based but should have continuous presence of equipment and battalion-sized elements.

[c] Conley et al., 2016. This proposal recommends 13 total brigades to support effective deterrence.

[d] Franklin D. Kramer and Bantz J. Craddock, *Effective Defense of the Baltics*, Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council, May 2016.

[e] Anderson R. Reed, Patrick J. Ellis, Antonio M. Paz, Kyle A. Reed, Lendy Reenegar, and John T. Vaughn, *Strategic Landpower and a Resurgent Russia: An Operational Approach to Deterrence*, Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2016.

RAND Corporation (2016)

In 2016, the RAND Corporation released a report that examined the problem of defending Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania against a hypothetical Russian invasion. The product of more than a year's worth of war games and subsequent analysis, the report found that Russian forces could reach the doorsteps of the Baltic capitals in 36 to 60 hours, given current NATO forces available in Europe. The small number of lightly equipped NATO formations able to deploy to the Baltics before the invasion proved incapable of stopping or meaningfully impeding a numerically superior and more heavily equipped Russian foe. The study found through subsequent games featuring different NATO posture levels that seven brigades (three of which would be armored units) plus necessary supporting elements could potentially prevent a rapid Russian takeover. Not all of these brigades, according to the study, would need to be positioned in the Baltic States. Lighter, infantry-based formations could be positioned elsewhere in Europe and rely on their high mobility to quickly respond to threatening Russian troop movements. The three heavy brigades, however, would need to be in the Baltic States ahead of the onset of hostilities. This posture could be achieved by placing the brigades in Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania on a full-time or rotational basis. Alternatively, only the brigades' equipment could be prepositioned, with the necessary complement of troops arriving by air as necessary. These seven brigades would still be outnumbered by an opposing force, but their presence would significantly increase the costs and risks associated with an attack, demonstrating to Russia that an assault on the Baltics would not be an easy proposition.[55]

RAND Corporation (2015)

A 2015 RAND study assessed the challenges associated with various scenarios involving the potential for conflict between Russia and NATO. Based on extensive gaming, the study's analysis identified the following enhancements that would be key to improving the conventional balance in NATO's favor on the eastern flank of the Alliance:

1. Station and preposition equipment and sustainment for roughly three U.S. ABCTs in the Baltic States.
2. Station a U.S. Army fires brigade in Poland.
3. Through arms sales and training, help the Baltic States to enhance the capabilities of their forces to slow, damage, and destroy mechanized ground forces.
4. Work with NATO allies to identify and raise the readiness and availability of armored forces that can constitute an operational reserve for forward-based forces.
5. Develop and field enhancements to U.S. and allied capabilities designed to rapidly suppress and destroy enemy air defenses. These could include new systems for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; targeting; jamming; and strike.
6. Develop and field effective area munitions for attacks on armored and mechanized forces. Large stocks of these weapons would need to be deployed in-theater in peacetime.
7. Develop and field effective short-range air defense systems, such as the U.S. Army's Indirect Fire Protection Capability Increment 2 system. These systems would be stationed in-theater at main air bases and near other critical nodes for logistics and for command and control.

[55] Shlapak and Johnson, 2016.

While the main ground force units recommended by this analysis are similar to those in the 2016 RAND report, this study also includes recommendations for several long-term investments in Air Force capabilities that would take several years to come to fruition. These include, most notably, capabilities designed to degrade land-based air defense systems, as well as improved anti-armor munitions and modern short-range air defense systems. Such systems could have substantial strategic effects, as discussed in Chapter Four.[56]

CSIS

A study by CSIS sees a similar need for increases in U.S. Army personnel in Europe. In the report, CSIS researchers used a 1:3 defender-to-attacker force ratio as a target to achieve sufficient deterrence. This ratio would still leave the attacker with a good chance of success, but not without incurring serious losses. To achieve this ratio, the researchers use a multi-tiered approach, with a combination of forward-deployed forces (positioned in potential conflict areas, such as the Baltics) acting as a "tripwire"; rapid-response forces, such as the NRF and its VJTF component; and follow-on forces to provide additional reinforcements. The report recommends adding another rotationally-deployed ABCT to Europe to the one already provided for by the ERI. In addition, to allow for the deployment of follow-on forces, the CSIS researchers recommend enough prepositioned equipment for eight brigades — the two permanent U.S. brigades in Europe, the rotational ABCT in the ERI, the additional ABCT recommended by CSIS, and four more brigades deployed from the mainland United States. The authors recommend placing additional Army Prepositioned Stocks beyond the reach of the most-threatening Russian anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities in Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. European Activity Sets (equipment for a combined arms battalion) should be located closer to NATO's eastern flank, with three battalions' worth in Poland and a European Activity Set for one company each in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Bulgaria. With five other brigades provided by NATO allies, the report asserts that the 1:3 force ratio can be achieved and can provide a credible deterrent.[57]

Atlantic Council

A 2016 Atlantic Council report also argues for shoring up NATO deterrence in Eastern Europe. The study proposes converting the Baltic States' current light land forces into heavy units, with each state possessing one heavy armored or mechanized brigade. These formations should also be amply supplied with anti-air and anti-armor weaponry to increase their capabilities. The report also calls for creating three multinational battalions, one for each Baltic country. Each battalion would comprise three companies: one U.S. (with forces drawn from those currently positioned in the Baltics), one Baltic, and one European. These battalions would be supported by additional heavy mechanized or armored units.

In addition to creating new forces and upgrading existing formations, the report argues that initiatives analogous to those of the U.S.-specific ERI should be adopted for the wider NATO alliance. Germany, the United Kingdom, and Poland would each provide one heavy brigade postured to deploy on short notice. These forces, supported by additional units from the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway, would be on a similar footing as the rotational

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[56] Ochmanek et al., 2017.

[57] Conley et al., 2016.

ABCT from the United States. A high-tempo NATO exercise schedule could also provide additional presence in the Baltic region, and the study recommends that the United States consider higher readiness for Army aviation and the Marine Corps equipment set in Norway as potential additions to future iterations of the ERI. An additional problem is Russia's suite of advanced A2/AD weapons — most notably, its long-range anti-air and anti-ship missile systems. The study recommends enhancing NATO air and naval forces in the Baltic region to counteract a Russian A2/AD advantage.[58]

Army War College

In May 2016, six Army War College students published a report on the state of NATO deterrence against Russia. They argue that although current efforts under the United States' ERI and NATO's RAP may reassure NATO allies on the eastern flank, those efforts are insufficient by themselves to support deterrence, necessitating additional measures. However, the report cautions that a careful balance should be struck. Force posture improvements are necessary for deterrence — the authors write that "capability is the backbone of credibility" — but doing too much might incite a Russian response or placate allies willing to let the United States shoulder the burden for NATO defense. Therefore, the report suggests taking steps toward a more permanent presence: creating a headquarters with a two-star command that is more capable of liaising with European corps-level commands, ending the regionally aligned forces policy in lieu of forces specifically assigned to Europe, and a continuous ABCT presence in the Baltic area. On this third proposal, the report finds, "One continuous ABCT is the right balance — any more force structure could provoke Russia and exhaust U.S. Army means, yet any less would leave the Baltic States unacceptably exposed." Meanwhile, the report calls for NATO allies to contribute more to deterrence by developing their own forces and capabilities.[59]

Summary of Proposals

While these proposals are diverse, most of them suggest notably increasing NATO armored units present in or near the Baltics. The numbers of personnel involved, typically between one and three brigades, are not sufficient to affect the overall balance of forces between NATO and Russia, but they do represent a sizable increase in the NATO forces present in the Baltic region, as shown in Table 2.1 earlier.

In general, these proposals focus on enhancing land forces, with less attention to air or naval assets. Our assessment of potential future NATO posture enhancements contained in these proposals therefore also focuses mostly on land forces. However, this is not meant to imply that additional air and naval forces in Europe may not have an important role to play in enhancing the security of NATO members. Such a finding would require an operational analysis that is beyond the scope of this report. But air and naval forces may affect Russian calculations in a manner different from land forces, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

In any of these proposals, the level of additional forces discussed is likely not sufficient to allow NATO to achieve full deterrence by denial; the studies themselves often make this point. Even if the most robust recommendations were to be implemented, Russian forces could

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[58] Kramer and Craddock, 2016.

[59] Reed et al., 2016.

still attain limited military objectives in such theaters as the Baltic States over the near term. Instead of fully deterring Russian military success, the proposed posture changes have the potential to make an incursion a more costly proposition for Russia and therefore to shift the strategic calculations of Russian decisionmakers against undertaking such operations. However, these calculations are likely to depend on several factors beyond the balance of forces deployed to the Baltics and Eastern Europe. The next chapter provides a detailed description of the full range of factors that are likely to be considered in Moscow when Russian decisionmakers assess whether proposed U.S. and NATO posture enhancements will have the greater deterrent effect intended.

CHAPTER THREE

Factors Affecting Russian Decisionmaking

To assess likely Russian reactions to NATO posture enhancements, we needed to understand what factors were likely to shape Russian thinking on this issue. We researched this question in three main ways. First, we read what the Russians themselves have written about NATO intentions, NATO capabilities, Russian strategic objectives, and related issues. Russia has a robust culture of writing and discussion regarding strategic issues. We reviewed recent official Russian publications, such as the 2014 Russian Military Doctrine[1] and the 2015 National Security Strategy.[2] We also conducted a detailed survey of several official or quasi-official strategic journals, such as *Foreign Military Review* (*Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*), *Military Thought* (*Voyennaya Mysl*), *International Affairs*, *Russia in Global Affairs*, and *National Strategy Issues* (*Problemy Natsional'noy Strategii*).

Second, we examined the historical record to see what issues, in what context, have and have not prompted strong Russian reactions in the past. Russia and NATO have had more than two decades of post-Soviet strategic interactions, including notable conflicts in Kosovo, Georgia, and Ukraine, and several rounds of NATO expansion, all of which occurred alongside substantial variation in relative Russian economic and military capabilities. Although the manner in which Russia has reacted to events in the past is no guarantee that its future reactions will be similar, we can analyze these events to better understand Russian interests and the relative importance Russia appears to place on different issues. A summary timeline of NATO and Russian interactions over the past 20 years is included for reference in Appendix A.

Third, we reviewed the academic literature on Russian strategic issues and more generally on how states that are in strategic and political situations similar to Russia's have historically behaved. Many analysts of Russia have written perceptively on numerous aspects of Russian behavior and decisionmaking, and our own analysis benefited greatly from their insights. In addition, while Russia has several distinct characteristics as a state, it also faces political and security challenges that are common to many states. Concepts from the international relations literature, such as diversionary warfare and the security dilemma, may therefore have substantial relevance for understanding Russian motivations and behaviors going forward.

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1 Russian Federation, *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, Moscow, 2014a. For the official version of the doctrine in Russian, see Russian Federation, *Voennaya doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [*The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*], Moscow, December 30, 2014b.

2 Russian Federation, *The Russian Federation's National Security Strategy*, Moscow, 2015a. For the official version of the strategy in Russian, see Russian Federation, *Strategiya Natsionalnoy Bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [*The Russian Federation's National Security Strategy*], Moscow, 2015b.

The remainder of this chapter summarizes the results of our research. In total, we identified 11 main factors likely to drive Russian reactions to U.S. and NATO posture enhancements, which we divide into three categories: the broader strategic context, Russian domestic context, and characteristics of the proposed posture enhancements.

Strategic Context

The strategic context between Russia and NATO is likely to strongly shape Russian reactions to any NATO posture enhancements in Europe. Our research highlights four aspects of the strategic context as being particularly important in this regard:

- NATO's relative overall capabilities
- NATO's relative local capabilities
- Russian perceptions of NATO's intentions
- Russian perceptions of NATO's willingness to defend its members against aggression.

NATO's Relative Overall Capabilities

NATO's current overall military superiority relative to Russia is a vital part of its ability to deter localized Russian aggression. As will be discussed later, NATO's ability to launch an effective counterattack to expel an invasion of NATO territory helps to compensate for its lack, in some places, of local military parity.[3] Further, NATO has other, broader capabilities that give it additional tools to punish Russia for an attack. These capabilities could range from economic sanctions, including essentially cutting Russia off from international financial markets, to a military response in other locations where the local balance of forces is more clearly in favor of NATO.[4]

Despite—or indeed because of—the advantages that NATO's overall superiority provides, this superiority also has the potential to make certain types of Russian aggression more likely. When a state perceives the overall balance of power to be in another state's favor, particularly if that state is a potential adversary, this fuels security concerns.[5] These concerns, in turn, can prompt the vulnerable state to protect itself by adopting a number of aggressive responses (as perceived by the more powerful state), including spending more on defense, keeping forces at heightened levels of alert to enhance preparedness for conflict, and even pursuing limited aggression to secure militarily important areas.[6]

While NATO sees its forces as primarily defensive in nature, there are several reasons to believe that Russia sees NATO forces as threatening. To begin with, the Russians say so. Russia's decision to invest heavily in military modernization and to shield military budgets from cuts even in very difficult fiscal environments, as well as the numerous large-scale exercises the

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3 John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983, pp. 53–56.

4 Carol Matlack, "Swift Justice: One Way to Make Putin Howl," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, September 4, 2014.

5 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979.

6 Charles L. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 1, October 1997.

country has held in recent years, also suggest that in the current situation, Russia feels the need to take steps to respond to this imbalance and better ensure its own security.[7]

Further, although analysts have typically pointed to Russia's nuclear forces as a reason to downplay the possibility that a threat to Russia's homeland could be credible, there are reasons to believe that Russia may not view its nuclear forces as providing absolute protection from a NATO attack. Russia does have a huge nuclear weapon arsenal, including mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched ballistic missiles that are difficult to locate, track, and target. Together, these have long been thought to give Russia a secure second-strike capability and a strong deterrent against attacks on the Russian homeland.[8] However, after the Cold War and despite Russian efforts to maintain spending on its nuclear forces, the readiness and reliability of Russia's nuclear forces may have eroded. At the same time, U.S. intelligence capabilities against the type of mobile targets that make up the core of a secure second-strike capability have become more effective. Some analysts have argued that the net effect of these trends is a more vulnerable Russian nuclear arsenal and the possibility of a theoretical, if unlikely, threat to Russia's fundamental security from U.S. nuclear weapons.[9]

Aside from these analyses, Russian statements and policies also suggest that Russians have very real concerns about the nuclear balance. Russian leaders believe that nuclear parity with the United States ensured Russia's security during the Cold War and that such parity remains the best option for doing so today.[10] As will be discussed in more detail later, Russia has recently been highly sensitive to changes in U.S. or NATO posture or capabilities that could affect strategic stability, including ballistic missile defense (BMD) systems and Prompt Global Strike (PGS). Russia's recent nuclear modernization programs may also be related to concerns about the vulnerability of its arsenal.

Overall NATO capabilities therefore can have complex effects on the likelihood of aggressive Russian actions. While NATO's clear overall military and economic superiority likely helps to sharply limit the risk of Russia deciding to initiate a large-scale conventional war against NATO, it may also make more-limited Russian aggressive actions—including military build-ups, more-provocative posture and exercises, and even potentially limited military aggression—more likely (holding other conditions constant). Russia may also respond in

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[7] Matthew Bodner, "Russian Military Spending to Increase by Less Than 1% Next Year," *Moscow Times*, October 26, 2015c; and Ian J. Brzezinski and Nicholas Varangis, "The NATO-Russia Exercise Gap," Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council, February 23, 2015.

[8] Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989; and Stephen Van Evera, "Primed for Peace: Europe After the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 1990, pp. 12–13. For a discussion of the requirements for obtaining a secure second strike, see Austin Long and Brendan Rittenhouse Green, "Stalking the Secure Second Strike: Intelligence, Counterforce, and Nuclear Strategy," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1–2, 2015.

[9] One recent analysis found that U.S. intelligence had more capability to track Soviet mobile missiles and submarines during the Cold War than previously realized. Recent developments in U.S. intelligence capabilities may have made the Russian nuclear force even more vulnerable (Long and Green, 2015). Another analysis argued that the United States might even be close to achieving nuclear primacy, meaning that a U.S. preemptive attack on Russia's nuclear forces could be so effective that Russia would not be able to launch a retaliatory nuclear strike (see Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, "The End of MAD? The Nuclear Dimension of U.S. Primacy," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 2006a; and Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, "The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy," *Foreign Affairs*, 2006b). Others have disputed that the trends have gone nearly that far (Keith Payne, Peter C. W. Flory, Pavel Podvig, and Alexei Arbatov, "Nuclear Exchange: Does Washington Really Have (or Want) Nuclear Primacy?" *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2006).

[10] Sergei Brezkun, "Nedorogo i serdito [Cheap and Angry]," VPK News, November 13, 2013.

asymmetric ways—for example, through information campaigns or cyber attacks. Further, enhanced NATO capabilities that have the potential to affect the nuclear balance may be especially likely to prompt an aggressive Russian response. That issue is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter when we consider the characteristics of posture enhancements.

NATO's Relative Local Capabilities

The literature suggests that NATO's deterrent against Russian aggression is likely to be weaker in areas where Russia has a local military advantage. Having the local military capability to prevent an adversary from seizing any territory in the first place—deterrence by denial—is typically considered the most effective form of deterrence.[11] Recent analysis has shown that NATO does not currently have that capability in the Baltic region.[12] As discussed in Chapter Two, however, NATO also did not have this capability in many locations during the Cold War, perhaps most notably in West Berlin. Nonetheless, in areas of local military disadvantage, NATO's ability to deter potential Russian aggression depends on demonstrating the capability and willingness to make such aggression unprofitable, either by launching a counterattack to expel the attackers and ensure military defeat or by imposing massive and long-lasting economic costs, or both.[13] While this type of deterrence can also be effective (and has been effective in the past), all things being equal, the potential for aggressive Russian actions is likely greater when Russia has local military advantages. Therefore, posture enhancements that help limit the extent of Russia's local advantage have the potential to reduce the risk of conflict.

If the location in question is near Russia's borders, as would be the case with NATO posture enhancements in Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania, these enhancements may also be perceived by Russia as particularly threatening, depending on their size and capabilities. We explore this issue in detail in the section on posture characteristics.

Russian Perceptions of NATO's Intentions

States typically assess threats by looking at both relative capabilities and the intentions of potential adversaries.[14] Over time, beliefs about intentions can become ingrained and affect how leaders interpret any new actions that a potential adversary may take.[15] As a result, posture enhancements that take place at a time of heightened tensions between Russia and the United States or NATO could be seen as particularly threatening.

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[11] Mearsheimer, 1983; Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996.

[12] Shlapak and Johnson, 2016.

[13] Mearsheimer, 1983, p. 56.

[14] For a general argument about intentions in threat assessments, see Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987.

[15] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*: Princeton University Press, 1976; Jack S. Levy, "Political Psychology and Foreign Policy," in Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013; Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989; Janice Gross Stein, "Building Politics into Psychology: The Misperception of Threat," *Political Psychology*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1988; and Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis*, Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984. Statesmen tend to be more prone to biased interpretations when the adversary has a very different ideology; see Mark L. Haas, "Ideology and Alliances: British and French External Balancing Decisions in the 1930s," *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4, Summer 2003.

Russian leaders are currently deeply suspicious of U.S. intentions in particular, making those leaders more likely to see malign intent behind U.S. force posture enhancements. Many Russian leaders feel that the United States and its allies have ignored Russian interests and attempts at cooperation in the post–Cold War period. NATO enlargement is often cited as clear evidence of NATO's pursuit of aims that threaten Russian security. Moreover, since the late 1990s, Russian leaders have argued that enlarging NATO to the east was a violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of earlier U.S. commitments to limit NATO enlargement.[16] In 2014, Putin argued, "NATO and the U.S. wanted a complete victory over the Soviet Union. They wanted to sit on the throne in Europe alone."[17] That same year, Putin argued that Russian global interests have been similarly ignored. The United States, in his view, built a biased international order and consistently violated international rules to promote its own interests at the expense of other states.[18]

Russia's concerns go beyond a sense of unfairness, however, to include a perception that the enlargements of NATO and the European Union (EU) constitute a clear threat to Russia. Russia has historically seen its influence in its "near abroad" (most frequently characterized as the former Soviet Union minus the Baltic States) as central to the economic, political, and physical security of the Russian homeland. In particular, if former Soviet states were to enter NATO or the EU, Russia's ability to exercise its influence over those states would be greatly diminished, and the potential for NATO or EU influence, or even military forces, in such territory would be greatly enhanced.[19] To ensure Russian security and maintain influence in the region after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia established "special relations" with surrounding states and built new institutions in which it maintained a privileged position.[20] Although Putin discounted a revived Soviet Union, he has sought a highly integrated, Russian-led Eurasian project that would become a global economic actor of the same import as the EU, China, or the United States.[21]

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[16] In 1990, some U.S. and West German leaders working to gain Soviet acquiescence for a reunified Germany within NATO appear to have given the Soviet Union verbal assurances that NATO would not expand any further to the east. U.S. policymakers were divided over making such assurances and never agreed to enshrining them in a written agreement. See Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shifrinson, "Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion," *International Security*, Vol. 40, No. 4, Spring 2016; and Mary Elise Sarotte, "A Broken Promise? What the West Really Told Moscow About NATO Expansion," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 5, September/October 2014.

[17] "Russia in Review," Cambridge, Mass.: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, January 15, 2016.

[18] For a statement of Putin's views, see Vladimir Putin, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," Sochi, Russia, October 24, 2014. For a more general discussion of Russia's views about U.S. and NATO intentions, see Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015, pp. 103, 109; and Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013.

[19] Olga Oliker, Keith Crane, Lowell H. Schwartz, and Cather Yusupov, *Russian Foreign Policy: Sources and Implications*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-768-AF, 2009, p. 111; and Dmitri Trenin, *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011, p. 104.

[20] Stephen J. Blank, "The Intellectual Origins of the Eurasian Union Project," in S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell, eds., *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and Its Discontents*, Washington, D.C., and Stockholm: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, 2014, p. 16.

[21] Vladimir Putin, "Novyy integratsionnyy proekt dlya Yevrazii budushchee kotoroe rozhdaetsya segodnya [A New Integration Project for Eurasia—A Future That Is Born Today]," *Izvestia*, October 3, 2011.

Russian leaders have seen Western political activities in these states as a threat to Russia's integration project—and to Russian security more broadly. Russia does not see a clear line between some political activities (such as democracy promotion) and broader strategic issues, and Russia views the United States and NATO as using such activities to threaten Russia. The 2014 Russian Military Doctrine discusses NATO aggression that blends traditional capabilities with nonmilitary means to achieve political objectives and identifies this as a key threat to Russian security. Media manipulation, propaganda, and information operations are examples of such means and can be leveraged to destabilize a government and bring about regime change.[22] The 2014 doctrine also identifies the danger posed by the "use of information and communications technology for political-military objectives," including the subversion of state sovereignty and the degradation of political independence and territorial integrity. A closely linked danger is that of "the establishment of regimes—such as through the overthrow of legitimate organs of state power—in states bordering Russia whose policies threaten the interests of the Russian Federation."[23] Uprisings such as the color revolutions (e.g., in Ukraine) and the Arab Spring (e.g., in Tunisia and Egypt) are, in the Russian view, examples of such actions conducted by Western governments.[24]

However, Russia's actions over the past two decades suggest that it values its influence over some former Soviet states more than others. For example, while Russia was concerned about plans for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to accede to NATO during 2002–2004, it largely acquiesced in the end, yet it has defended its interests in other post-Soviet states with much greater vigor. As one analyst put it, "Moscow was ready to renounce its claim on a role in its old sphere of interest: Central and Southeastern Europe, and the Baltics. But it resolved not to allow further Western encroachments into the territory it felt was its 'historical space.'"[25]

Keeping Ukraine within Russia's sphere of influence has been a top priority for security, economic, and historical reasons. Beyond its vital strategic location bordering Russia's heartland and hosting the Russian Black Sea fleet in Crimea, Ukraine has also been one of Russia's most important trading partners.[26] In the critical energy sphere, Ukraine not only has been a consumer of Russian natural gas but also is a gateway to European markets in the West.[27] The

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[22] Keir Giles, *Russia's "New" Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power*, London: Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2016; and Mary Ellen Connell and Ryan Evans, *Russia's "Ambiguous Warfare" and Implications for the U.S. Marine Corps*, Arlington, Va.: CNA, May 2015.

[23] Russian Federation, 2014a.

[24] Nicolas Bouchet, "Russia's 'Militarization' of Colour Revolutions," *Policy Perspectives*, Vol. 4, No. 2, January 2016. As Andrew Radin and Clint Reach explain,

> Since the end of the Cold War, a series of pro-democracy and pro-Western protests have led to changes in government in the post-Soviet space; these have been referred to as *color revolutions* because participants often used flowers or colors as symbols. While Western governments have a positive view of these events as the expression of free choice by the citizenry, Russian analysts and officials describe the color revolutions as Western-organized coups, designed to subvert the legitimate authorities. (Andrew Radin and Clint Reach, *Russian Views of the International Order*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1826-OSD, 2017)

[25] Trenin, 2011, p. 107. See also Svante E. Cornell, "The European Union: Eastern Partnership vs. Eurasian Union," in S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell, eds., *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and Its Discontents*, Washington, D.C., and Stockholm: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, 2014, p. 186.

[26] Trenin, 2011, p. 28.

[27] Oliker et al., 2009, p. 96.

historical idea that Ukraine is a core part of the Russian world and that Ukraine represents a vital "buffer state" against NATO remains powerful as well.[28] Russia has repeatedly lashed out and used its levers of influence—including control of natural gas—to discourage Ukraine from moving closer to Europe, especially through membership in the EU or NATO.[29] Russia's more recent aggression in Ukraine is discussed in detail later, but Russia's actions in 2014 demonstrate the extent to which it viewed Ukraine as a country inextricably connected to its "strategic orbit" and was unwilling to relinquish it without a fight.[30]

Although Russia does not appear to see Georgia as quite as central to its interests as Ukraine is, Russia has also viewed Georgia's integration into the West as a threat.[31] Russia pressured Georgia to join the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1993 by using the separatist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as leverage.[32] As with Ukraine, Russia has since used trade boycotts and energy price increases to exert its influence on Georgia. Russia has also used the deployment of peacekeepers to "frozen conflicts" in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, support for those territories' independence, the citizenship-conferring "passportization" practice, and deportation of Georgians from Russia to pressure Georgia.[33] As shown in 2008, and as is discussed in more detail later, Russia has demonstrated a willingness to use force to keep Georgia out of NATO as well.[34]

The color revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan in the early to mid-2000s were therefore viewed by Russia as a significant security challenge. The prospect of a successful integration into Western institutions—especially for Ukraine or Georgia—would be a serious blow to Russia's Eurasian project, to broader efforts to maintain its regional sphere of influence, and potentially to Russia's domestic stability.[35]

Given the stakes, most Russian policymakers view continued Western efforts to expand ties with Ukraine and Georgia as clear evidence of negative intentions toward Russia. The extent to which future perceptions of negative NATO intent remain, worsen, or improve is likely to affect how aggressively and in what manner Russia responds to any future NATO posture enhancements.

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[28] As he campaigned against the NATO decision in 2008 to promise eventual NATO membership to Ukraine and Georgia, President Putin remarked that Ukraine was "not even a state" (Trenin, 2011, p. 28).

[29] Ryan Maness and Brandon Valeriano, "Russia and the Near Abroad: Applying a Risk Barometer for War," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2012, pp. 125–148; Jakob Hedenskog and Robert Larsson, *Russian Leverage on the CIS and the Baltic States*, Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), 2007; and Mamuka Tsereteli, "Georgia and Moldova: Staying the Course," in S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell, eds., *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and Its Discontents*, Washington, D.C., and Stockholm: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, 2014, p. 135

[30] Olga Oliker, Christopher S. Chivvis, Keith Crane, Olesya Tkacheva, and Scott Boston, *Russian Foreign Policy in Historical and Current Context: A Reassessment*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-144-A, 2015, p. 23.

[31] Trenin, 2011, p. 149; Oliker et al., 2009, p. 97.

[32] Tsereteli, 2014, p. 138.

[33] Hedenskog and Larsson, 2007. *Passportization* is the process by which Russia extends large numbers of Russian passports to residents of another country, often those with family or cultural ties to Russia, making them Russian citizens on whose behalf Russia can then intervene in the country.

[34] Trenin, 2011, pp. 93–101.

[35] Cornell, 2014, p. 186; Oliker et al., 2009, p. 101.

Russian Perceptions of NATO's Willingness to Defend Its Members Against Aggression

Russian calculations regarding whether to pursue aggressive actions against a NATO member are likely to depend not just on NATO capabilities but also on Russian perceptions of the willingness of NATO members to use force to defend other members. As discussed earlier, NATO members could enhance deterrence by showing resolve to launch a counterattack to retake any lost territory and to punish Russia for an attack—that is, by strengthening the credibility of its commitments under Article 5 of the NATO treaty.[36] While it is difficult to estimate with precision Russia's current views about NATO's resolve, Russia's historical behavior and the literature on deterrence offer several insights.

A country's promises to defend the territory of an ally, known as *extended deterrence*, are generally considered less credible than threats to defend the homeland or areas that are vital to the defense of the homeland.[37] That being said, the commitments made by NATO members to treat an attack on one member as an attack on all have several features that enhance their credibility. First, formal alliance commitments are costly signals about states' willingness to defend each other.[38] Empirical research shows that, historically, states uphold these commitments in the event of war about 75 percent of the time.[39] Democratic states, including all current members of the NATO alliance, uphold formal commitments at even higher rates. Second, NATO's institutionalized military cooperation and planning even in peacetime are further signals about the depth of its commitment compared with other alliances.[40] Third, Alliance commitments that involve a nuclear power tend to offer a stronger deterrent.[41] Finally, NATO's Article 5 provisions offer a clear redline—a conventional attack on a member nation—which enhances deterrence.[42]

While it is difficult to say how credible Russia currently views NATO's commitment to be, several pieces of evidence suggest that these commitments, at least for such key members as the United States, are likely to be seen as relatively strong. If Russia did view NATO as a "paper tiger," ultimately unwilling to bear costs to defend its members, then Russia's robustly demonstrated concern about the possibility of Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO becomes more difficult to explain.[43] Further, although NATO's concerns about the local imbalance of forces in the Baltic and other regions are certainly warranted (given perceptions of a newly aggressive Russia), this imbalance has been in place since Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania became NATO

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36 NATO, The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington, D.C., April 4, 1949.

37 Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966.

38 James D. Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands Versus Sinking Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 41, No. 1, February 1, 1997, p. 87; and James D. Morrow, "Alliances: Why Write Them Down?" *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2000.

39 Brett Ashley Leeds, "Alliance Reliability in Times of War: Explaining State Decisions to Violate Treaties," *International Organization*, Vol. 57, No. 4, 2003.

40 J.C. Johnson, B.A. Leeds, and A. Wu, "Capability, Credibility, and Extended General Deterrence," *International Interactions*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2015.

41 Matthew Fuhrmann and Todd S. Sechser, "Signaling Alliance Commitments: Hand-Tying and Sunk Costs in Extended Nuclear Deterrence," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 58, No. 4, October 2014.

42 Schelling, 1966, pp. 157–166; and Daniel Altman, "Is Crimea Obama's Fault? Why Deterrence Failed in Crimea," *Huffington Post*, May 18, 2014.

43 See, for example, Lyudmila Chernova, "Opinion: Russia Needn't Be Afraid of Paper Tiger NATO," RIA Novosti, April 18, 2014.

members in 2004. Russia has taken several nonmilitary steps against these states, including influence operations, passportization, and funding of opposition political parties. However, the fact that Russia has not initiated any military aggression against these states suggests that Russia may ascribe weight to NATO's Article 5 redline, although a lack of Russian interest in the Baltic States can also not be excluded.[44] Explicit commitments, such as those given in President Obama's speech in Tallinn in 2014, likely also play a role in reinforcing the credibility of NATO's commitment to the Baltic States by increasing the political costs that U.S. and NATO leaders would pay were they to ultimately back down in a crisis.[45]

Whatever Russia's current assessment of the resolve of key NATO members, some of the deterrence literature suggests that NATO posture enhancements could improve NATO's credibility. Additional enhancements in the Baltic and other regions have the potential to strengthen Russian perceptions of the credibility of NATO commitments. Although there is little academic research on how much states gain by making additional commitments beyond treaty guarantees, even a small NATO ground force in the area could, in theory, enhance deterrence by acting as a tripwire that would help ensure a larger NATO response to a Russian attack.[46] If all NATO members agreed to such a force and it included active participation by a large number of NATO members, it could further strengthen this signal.[47] Conversely, open disagreement within NATO over such a force, particularly if U.S. participation were called into question, would likely diminish Russia's assessment of Alliance commitment.

Russian Domestic Context

Political and economic factors inside Russia are also likely to shape Russian reactions to NATO posture enhancements. Our research suggests that changes in the extent of threats to Russian regime legitimacy, the power and composition of the Russian elite, and Putin's personal preferences could all affect Russian's foreign policy choices.

Extent of Threats to Regime Legitimacy

Threats to a regime's hold on power can change a state's foreign policy, although whether it makes the state more or less aggressive appears to vary depending on the circumstances. In some cases, domestic unrest can prompt senior officials to adopt more-peaceful policies in order to focus resources on internal threats or even to gain help from an outside power in restor-

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[44] See, for example, Heather A. Conley and Theodore P. Gerber, *Russian Soft Power in the 21st Century: An Examination of Russian Compatriot Policy in Estonia*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 2011, pp. 12–14.

[45] White House, "Remarks by President Obama to the People of Estonia," Washington, D.C., September 3, 2014c.

[46] One recent study, which focused on nuclear forces, found no additional deterrence benefit to placing forces on an ally's territory as opposed to simply making a commitment to that ally (Fuhrmann and Sechser, 2014). See also F. Stephen Larrabee, Peter A. Wilson, and John Gordon IV, *The Ukrainian Crisis and European Security: Implications for the United States and U.S. Army*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-903-A, 2015, p. 35.

[47] Thomas J. Christensen, *Worse Than a Monolith: Alliance Politics and Problems of Coercive Diplomacy in Asia*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011; and David Patrikarakos, "The West's 'Ukraine Fatigue,'" *Politico*, September 29, 2015.

ing order.[48] In other cases, crises of legitimacy can lead statesmen to provoke crises or pursue riskier foreign policies in order to divert public attention from problems at home or to restore public unity.[49] It should be noted that how frequently and under what circumstances this type of diversionary foreign policy occurs in practice remains contested in the academic literature.[50]

Threatened regimes may also be more willing to intervene in the domestic politics of neighboring states. There is evidence that anti-regime protests and democracy movements in one state can make similar movements in neighboring states more likely, and this appears to be a substantial concern of Russia, particularly with regard to former Soviet states.[51] Anti-regime and democratic groups may be inspired by or learn about the tactics of groups in a nearby state.[52] Intentional actions by foreign governments or nongovernmental groups can also facilitate these movements by spreading ideas, technology, and resources.[53] Although such movements are rarely effective in achieving regime change or democratization,[54] concern about such movements can lead statesmen to intervene abroad to stop sources of instability at their origin.[55]

Regime insecurity remains a pressing concern for Russian leaders, and in the current context, it is likely to lead to more-competitive, rather than more-cooperative, Russian responses to NATO posture enhancements. Mass protests and rioting in Russia, motivated by economic hardship and government corruption, have made regime security a concern in recent years.[56]

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[48] Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 1991; and M. Taylor Fravel, "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 2, Fall 2005.

[49] Jack S. Levy, "The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique," in Manus I. Midlarsky, ed., *Handbook of War Studies*, Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989; and George W. Downs and David M. Rocke, "Conflict, Agency, and Gambling for Resurrection: The Principal-Agent Problem Goes to War," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 1994. In other cases, regime insecurity leads statesmen to divert attention by suppressing minorities at home (Jaroslav Tir and Michael Jasinski, "Domestic-Level Diversionary Theory of War: Targeting Ethnic Minorities," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 52, No. 5, October 1, 2008).

[50] Giacomo Chiozza and Henk E. Goemans, "Avoiding Diversionary Targets," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 41, No. 4, July 2004, p. 424; Jaroslav Tir, "Territorial Diversion: Diversionary Theory of War and Territorial Conflict," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 72, No. 2, 2010; Sung Chul Jung, "Searching for Non-Aggressive Targets: Which States Attract Diversionary Actions?" *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 51, No. 6, 2014; and Kyle Haynes, "Diversionary Conflict: Demonizing Enemies or Demonstrating Competence?" *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 2015.

[51] Henry E. Hale, "Regime Change Cascades: What We Have Learned from the 1848 Revolutions to the 2011 Arab Uprisings," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 16, No. 1, May 2013, pp. 338–342; Michael McFaul, "Ukraine Imports Democracy: External Influences on the Orange Revolution," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Fall 2007; Vera Zakem, Paul Saunders, and Daniel Antoun, *Mobilizing Compatriots: Russia's Strategy, Tactics, and Influence in the Former Soviet Union*, Arlington, Va.: CNA, November 2015; and Agnia Grigas, *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016a.

[52] Beth A. Simmons, Frank Dobbin, and Geoffrey Garrett, "Introduction: The International Diffusion of Liberalism," *International Organization*, Vol. 60, Fall 2006; Timur Kuran, "Ethnic Dissimilation and Its International Diffusion," in David A. Lake and Donald S. Rothchild, eds., *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998, pp. 50–52; and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Michael D. Ward, "Diffusion and the International Context of Democratization," *International Organization*, Vol. 60, No. 4, Fall 2006.

[53] Hale, 2013, pp. 338–340.

[54] Hale, 2013.

[55] Stephen M. Walt, *Revolution and War*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996; and Jacob D. Kathman, "Civil War Diffusion and Regional Motivations for Intervention," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 55, No. 6, December 1, 2011.

[56] Sangwon Yoon, "Obama Saw Too Late Putin's Return Would Undermine Reset," Bloomberg, 2015.

During a period of economic growth from 2000 to 2008, Putin had strong support from the Russian middle and upper classes. However, after this period, falling oil prices and a failure to implement structural reforms led to Russia's second financial crisis of the decade. Economic hardships combined with charges of vote rigging in the 2011 elections seem to have motivated a series of protests, sometimes referred to as the Snow Revolution, that lasted until 2013. As many as 160,000 people may have participated in a 2012 protest in Moscow.[57] Large-scale protests have been less frequent in recent years as Putin's popularity has rallied and internal security measures have been tightened, although smaller-scale protests continue.[58] For example, the 2014 March of Peace demonstrations against the Russian annexation of Crimea brought out thousands of protesters.[59] A more recent nationwide protest occurred in early 2015, after the murder of a significant opposition figure, former Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov.[60]

Although recent protests have been smaller, recent government policies suggest an enduring concern about internal security. In early 2016, for example, Putin announced the creation of a new law enforcement body known as the National Guard. Officially, the organization is dedicated to fighting terrorism and organized crime within Russia, but political analysts believe it will also be used to curtail civil resistance movements and protests.[61]

Although Russia could, in theory, try to reduce tensions with NATO during a period of heightened regime instability as it did at the end of the Cold War, this appears unlikely in the current context. Western democracy promotion efforts, hostile media coverage, and nongovernmental organization involvement in the color revolutions of nearby states have reportedly convinced Russian leaders that the United States is pursuing a policy of regime change in Russia.[62] Moreover, during the Snow Revolution and other protests, the Russian government claimed that the United States government was somehow involved in planning or influencing Russian civil resistance movements. This was particularly evident in 2011, when Putin denounced Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for organizing the protests in Russia's capital.[63] Russia does not discount the possibility that Moscow might be the scene of the next upheaval.[64]

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[57] The number of individuals involved in this protest varies from 36,000 (the number of protestors as announced by the Russian police) to 160,000 (the number released by protest organizers). See Grigorii Golosov, "Russian Protests: This Time It's Different," Open Democracy Russia, December 12, 2011; Sasha De Vogel, "From Economic Crisis to Political Crisis," Institute of Modern Russia, November 19, 2013; and "Russia's Snow Revolutionaries Ponder Next Move," Sputnik News, February 6, 2012.

[58] Denis Volkov, "Does Russia's Protest Movement Have a Future?" Institute of Modern Russia, February 24, 2015a.

[59] The protest was reported by Reuters to be in the "tens of thousands," although Russian police announced that only 3,000 protesters were in attendance ("UPDATE 1—Ukraine Crisis Triggers Russia's Biggest Anti-Putin Protest in Two Years," Reuters, March 15, 2014).

[60] "Boris Nemtsov Murder: Tens of Thousands March in Moscow," BBC News, March 1, 2015.

[61] "Putin Creates New National Guard in Russia 'to Fight Terrorism,'" BBC News, April 6, 2016; and "Putin's Personal Army: Analysts on Russia's National Guard," *Moscow Times*, April 7, 2016.

[62] Hill and Gaddy, 2013, p. 363; Stent, 2015; Oliker et al., 2015.

[63] David Herszenhorn, David Barry, and Ellen Barry, "Putin Contends Clinton Incited Unrest Over Vote," *New York Times*, December 8, 2011; and Steve Gutterman and Gleb Bryanski, "Putin Says U.S. Stoked Russian Protests," Reuters, December 8, 2011.

[64] Roland Oliphant, "Vladimir Putin: We Must Stop a Ukraine-Style 'Coloured Revolution' in Russia," *Telegraph*, November 20, 2014; Trenin, 2011, p. 74; Hill and Gaddy, 2013, p. 306.

Russian leaders could have incentives to pursue diversionary foreign policies in the future. Since the 2011 protests, President Putin has been actively cultivating "aggrieved nationalism and Anti-Americanism" as a unifying force in Russia.[65] Although Putin is thought to have a great deal of control over public opinion, there is some risk that nationalism could quickly take on a life of its own and that future Russian leaders would feel greater pressure to respond to nationalist demands, even if they judged doing so to be highly risky.[66] Moreover, following the conflicts in both Georgia and Crimea, public opinion of Russian leadership rose dramatically, as many Russian citizens felt that their government was solidifying its place as a resurgent power after the end of the Cold War.[67] If threats to the regime's legitimacy persist or increase in the future, then lessons about the benefits of appealing to nationalism may tend to make diversionary policies an appealing response.

Relative Power and Preferences of Factions Within Russia's Elite

Authoritarian leaders have often been considered more conflict-prone than democratic leaders, who can be punished by voters for making poor foreign policy choices.[68] But recent research has shown that even in authoritarian states, elite groups can restrain leaders from pursuing risky or provocative foreign policies. Two factors can affect the strength of these restraints. First, if the elite have an independent source of power, autocratic leaders can be restrained by the threat of overthrow in the event of poor foreign policy choices. Second, elite groups have a restraining effect only if they have incentives to oppose more-confrontational foreign policies. To the extent that the hold on power of the current regime in Moscow depends on the support of those who benefit from peaceful relations, such as foreign trade, Russian responses could be less conflictual. Conversely, if elite groups can make private gains from conflictual relations with the West, such as through ties to the defense industry, they are less likely to have a restraining effect on Russian foreign policy.[69]

In Russia, current indications are that the elite's power derives from Putin rather than from independent sources.[70] Although an individual may hold a particular position as a min-

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[65] George W. Breslauer, "Observations on Russia's Foreign Relations Under Putin," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2009, p. 375.

[66] Marlène Laruelle, ed., *Russian Nationalism, Foreign Policy and Identity Debates in Putin's Russia: New Ideological Patterns After the Orange Revolution*, Stuttgart, Germany: Ibidem Press, 2014, p. 8; Yoon, 2015; Christian Neef, "Fortress of Nationalism: Russia Is Losing Its Political Morals," Spiegel Online, March 31, 2015; Kathrin Hille, "Putin Appeals to Nationalist Support as Economy Wobbles," *Financial Times*, July 26, 2015; "The Bonfire of the Vans of Cheese," *Economist*, August 15, 2015; and Gideon Rachman, "Vladimir Putin's Survival Strategy Is Lies and Violence," *Financial Times*, March 2, 2015.

[67] Denis Volkov, "Russian Elite Opinion After Crimea," Carnegie Moscow Center, March 23, 2016; Pew Research Center, "Russia: Public Backs Putin, Crimea's Succession," in *Despite Concerns About Governance, Ukrainians Want to Remain One Country*, May 8, 2014; and Stephen D. Shenfield, "The Impact of the War in Georgia on Russian Public Opinion," *Abkhaz World*, August 7, 2010.

[68] Michael W. Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1983.

[69] Jessica L. Weeks points to China, where leaders rise through the party system rather than through personal loyalty to a leader, as an example of a system that can more effectively restrain foreign policies (Jessica L. Weeks, "Strongmen and Straw Men: Authoritarian Regimes and the Initiation of International Conflict," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 106, No. 2, 2012, p. 330).

[70] The absence of a formal process for developing Russian governmental policy and the lack of transparency complicates analysis of Russian decisionmaking (Jørgen Staun, *Siloviki Versus Liberal-Technocrats: The Fight for Russia and Its Foreign Policy*, Danish Institute for International Studies, Report No. 2007:9, 2007, p. 9).

ister or adviser, most important decisions are not made in a formalized or official process.[71] Instead, the Putin administration has instituted a "power vertical" structure in which individuals with positions of power are chosen by the Russian President.[72] Even nominally independent oligarchs realize that the security of their position depends on the approval of Putin, a point made explicitly after the 2003 arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, head of energy firm Yukos, and the 2004 seizure of that firm.[73] In this way, Putin has created an elite group, similar to the Soviet *nomenklatura* who made up the Soviet Politburo, leading some to refer to the new group emerging from the Putin administration as "Politburo 2.0."[74] Although the Russian bureaucracy is large, this small, unelected group decides most issues related to foreign and domestic policy through ad hoc groups and one-on-one discussions.[75] Given their lack of independence, these elites appear to be unlikely to impose significant restraints on Putin's decisionmaking.

If elite groups were to develop stronger independent sources of power in the future, the effect that they would likely have on Russian foreign policy would depend on which faction is dominant. Although there is a possibility that a new power group could develop, in the near term, Russian leadership is likely to comprise individuals from one of the two largest factions within the government.[76] The most powerful faction currently is the *siloviki* (persons of power/force)—individuals who come primarily from the Russian intelligence services and military. The second most powerful group is the *liberals*, or *liberal technocrats*, who are individuals with ties to business and generally argue for steps to further the development of the Russian economy.[77] While currently having limited influence over policy, a third group—the *nationalists*—may also have the potential to increase its influence in the future, as discussed later in this section. It is important to note that there is substantial heterogeneity in the views of individuals in each of these groups, although we can identify certain broad characteristics of each group.

To the extent that the siloviki remain the dominant force, Russian responses to NATO are likely to continue to be adversarial, though pragmatic. By contrast, a rise in the liberal technocrats could lead to a more cooperative approach with the West, and presumably a reduced Russian interest in pursuing open conflict with NATO. An increase in influence by nationalists could lead to more-aggressive actions.

Siloviki

Individuals in the siloviki network of Putin's inner circle are associated with Putin's security apparatus. Many argue that these individuals, whose careers and interests are largely centered around the military and defense sector, are the most organized and influential group within

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[71] Staun, 2007.

[72] Andrew C. Kuchins, "Putin's Dilemma," *Global Forecast 2015*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2014; and Olga Kryshtanovskaya and Stephen White, "Putin's Militocracy," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2003.

[73] Marshall I. Goldman, "Putin and the Oligarchs," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2004.

[74] Kryshtanovskaya and White, 2003.

[75] Staun, 2007, pp. 7–10; Eric Shiraev, *Russian Government and Politics: Comparative Government and Politics*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 149–150; Olga Kryshtanovskaya and Stephen White, "Inside the Putin Court: A Research Note," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 7, November 2005, pp. 1065–1075.

[76] Some estimates contend that there are roughly between two and ten main political factions within the Russian government that vie for power and influence; see Ian Bremmer and Samuel Charap, "The *Siloviki* in Putin's Russia: Who They Are and What They Want," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 1, January 5, 2010.

[77] Staun, 2007, pp. 4–5.

the Russian government. As Putin previously held a career at the KGB (Committee for State Security) and ran the FSB (Federal Security Service) after the fall of the Soviet Union, many of Putin's most trusted advisers hail from the Russian intelligence community.[78]

The siloviki consider the continuance of a strong state to be the most important thing for Russian society. Therefore, this group promotes a strong, centralized government. Domestically, the siloviki are wary of wealthy oligarchs ruling vast swaths of Russian resources. For this reason, the siloviki advocated the nationalization of Russian energy resources and were reported to be the driving force behind the Yukos takeover of 2004.[79] In foreign policy, the siloviki have used nationalist ideas to mobilize support for policies designed to bring about the resurgence of Russia as a great power. The annexation of Crimea was described and promoted in nationalist terms, for example.[80] However, the current siloviki-dominated administration has shown only limited support for other aspects of a Russian nationalist program, such as the annexation of other neighboring regions with large Russian populations or any attempts to enhance an ethnically centered Russian national identity domestically.[81] Support for the Novorossiya project in eastern Ukraine, for example, appears to have been limited and strategic in nature, and annexation of the territory was not pursued.[82] The nationalism of most siloviki is generally moderate in content (at least compared with other Russian nationalists who are discussed later) and pragmatic in pursuit of its goal of increasing the power of the Russian state.

The siloviki have also been strong supporters of continued high levels of defense spending. Military modernization programs supported by this spending may themselves provide increased incentives to use newly procured weapons and systems in conflicts, particularly to test equipment or train personnel. This was recently seen in Syria, in which the Russian military was able to test newly acquired cruise missiles.[83]

Liberal Technocrats

The second group of trusted advisors to Putin is the liberal technocrats group, or liberals, frequently associated with Dmitry Medvedev.[84] These individuals should not be confused with

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[78] Tatiana Kastoueva-Jean, *Russia's Domestic Evolution, What Impact on Its Foreign Policy?* Institut Francais Des Relations Internationales, Policy Paper No. 84, April 2015; Volkov, 2016. Some of the main individuals in the siloviki group include FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev, Rosneft official Igor Sechin, former Presidential Administration Director Sergei Ivanov, and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu ("Naval'nyj prizval Zapad napravit' sankcii na vnutrennij krug Putina [Navalny Called for the West to Direct Sanctions Toward the Inner Circle of Putin]," RBK, March 20, 2014; Bremmer and Charap, 2007; and "'Politbjuro 2.0' i sirijskij gambit ['Politburo 2.0' and the Syrian Gambit]," Minčenko Konsalting, November 3, 2011).

[79] Bremmer and Charap, 2007, p. 84.

[80] Marlène Laruelle, "Russia as a 'Divided Nation,' from Compatriots to Crimea: A Contribution to the Discussion on Nationalism and Foreign Policy," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 62, No. 2, 2015, pp. 94–95.

[81] Laruelle, 2015; and Luke March, "Nationalism for Export? The Domestic and Foreign-Policy Implications of the New 'Russian Idea,'" *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 64, No. 3, 2012, pp. 420–421.

[82] Laruelle, 2015, p. 94.

[83] Reid Standish, "Russia Is Using Syria as a Training Ground for Its Revamped Military and Shiny New Toys," *Foreign Policy*, December 9, 2015; Dmitry Gorenburg and Michael Kofman, "There Is No Russian Withdrawal from Syria," War on the Rocks, March 18, 2016; and "Bitva pri bjudžete [The Battle of the Budget]," *Kommersant*, July 4, 2016.

[84] Other notable persons in this group are Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich, Central Bank Governor Elvira Nabiullina, and Finance Minister Anton Siluanov (Gregory Stoupnitzky and Shamil Yenikeyeff, "Will Russia's Liberal Technocrats Restructure Its Oil Industry?" Beyondbrics, *Financial Times*, November 5, 2015). Some analysts separate liberals from technocrats; see Bremmer and Charap, 2007.

liberals in Western countries, who typically advocate democratic values. The liberal technocrats still espouse the view that Russia should have a vertical power structure with a strong executive but argue that any re-nationalization of Russian resources should be done slowly.[85]

Liberal technocrats are most concerned about economic and structural reforms of the Russian government. Most liberal technocrats, notably Aleksei Kudrin, view the dramatic increase in defense and security spending as being detrimental to the Russian economy, which many liberals feel is underdeveloped and lacks diversification. Although any Russian government would likely continue to oppose such actions as further NATO expansion, the liberal technocrats would be more likely than the siloviki to seek improved political and economic ties with the West.

Nationalists

As noted earlier, nationalist rhetoric is commonly employed by the current siloviki-dominated government in support of efforts to increase the power of the Russian state. However, this is not to say that the current regime is pursuing an aggressive Russian nationalist program. Domestically, Putin has resisted arguments that Russian nationalism be conceptualized in ethnic, rather than civic, terms.[86] In foreign policy, Russian nationalist goals are far more expansive than those pursued to date by the Putin regime:

> Disappointment is thus the main nationalist feeling regarding Russia's official foreign policy. If the most vocal nationalists had been able to shape foreign policy, Russia would not have been the status quo power it has been for the past two decades. It would have acted more aggressively in the Near Abroad, occupied Russian-populated parts of Estonia and northern Kazakhstan, rejected the "reset" policy with the United States, refused to improve relations with Poland and Central Europe, introduced a restricted visa regime with the Central Asian republics, and annexed the Arctic continental shelf. . . . With the exception of the 2008 recognition of South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence and the 2014 crisis in Ukraine, where Moscow breached international agreements to which it was beholden, Russia has been a conservative power on the international scene, while Russian nationalists have been calling for more preemptive actions.[87]

With the exception of Russia's promotion of the "Compatriots" policy—wherein Russia proclaims itself to be the defender of Russians, or Russian speakers, living abroad—Russian nationalists, such as Vladimir Zhirinovsky or Alexander Dugin, have had limited influence over policy.[88] However, there is certainly potential for their influence to grow. While the Russian government has been alternately promoting and restraining nationalist ideas as needed to build support for its policies and maintain internal stability, the government's ability to continue to control nationalism in this manner is not a given.[89] Popular support for nationalist goals could provide an independent source of political power to potential challengers that

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[85] Staun, 2007, pp. 30–31.

[86] Marlène Laruelle, "Misinterpreting Nationalism: Why Russkii Is Not a Sign of Ethnonationalism," PONARS Eurasia, Policy Memo No. 416, January 2016.

[87] Laruelle, 2015, p. 89.

[88] Laruelle, 2015, pp. 89–90, 95.

[89] March, 2012.

could seek to exploit any future frustrations with the essentially pragmatic approach of the current regime. Given the nationalists' more expansionist goals and potentially higher acceptance of the risks needed to achieve those goals, future increases in the influence that nationalists have over Russian policy could also lead to increases in the risk of conflict with NATO.

Preferences of Vladimir Putin

Although the exact strength of Putin's control could change over time, in the near term, he has and will likely continue to have a dominant influence on Russian foreign policy. The views of powerful leaders like Putin can often be discerned by their path to power and prior beliefs, as well as by looking at the record of their foreign policy actions.

Putin's path to power and views before becoming Russia's leader do not suggest that he has a predisposition toward using force or taking significant risks. However, his views do appear to have evolved toward a greater belief in the efficacy of the use of force. Autocrats that come to power through violence tend to be the greatest foreign policy risk-takers and most prone to using force.[90] Putin's path to power though the bureaucratic system suggests a more moderate and calculating predisposition than a revolutionary leader. Moreover, Putin did not come into his first term in office promising to implement expansionist policies. Several events, including further NATO enlargement, BMD systems based in Europe, and the color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, appear to have convinced him that the United States aims to weaken Russia and that Russian security demanded action.[91] Over time, Putin appears to have become more convinced that the exercise of military power, and the greater risks that accompany it, is a necessary part of defending the interests of Russia and ensuring his regime's security.

In personal terms, Putin is often described as a calculated risk-taker, highly motivated to increase the prestige of both himself and Russia. Putin has claimed to be deeply affected by the loss of Russian influence after the fall of the Soviet Union and the relative chaos of the years under President Boris Yeltsin, and he seeks to avoid future situations in which Russia, or its leader, are perceived as weak.[92] In addition, there have been instances in which emotional factors, and particularly perceived slights, may have colored Putin's decisionmaking. Putin has made several comments about how Ukraine's decision to pursue closer relations with the West and NATO was a betrayal of Russia's shared history and culture with Ukraine.[93] During the 2008 Georgia War, Putin stated that he aimed to hang Georgia's President Mikheil Saakashvili "by the balls."[94] Injecting these emotions into Russian foreign relations, while certainly part of a political effort to mobilize supporters and project strength and control, also likely reflects Putin's personal feelings and worldview of Russia as a victim of Western aggression that is fully justified in its aggressive, though calculated, responses.

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[90] Jeff D. Colgan, *Petro-Aggression: When Oil Causes War*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013; and Weeks, 2012, pp. 334–335.

[91] Hill and Gaddy, 2013, pp. 305–309.

[92] Brian Lampert, "Putin's Prospects: Vladimir Putin's Decision-Making Through the Lens of Prospect Theory," *Small Wars Journal*, February 15, 2016; Hill and Gaddy, 2013; and Tor Bukkvoll, "Why Putin Went to War: Ideology, Interests, and Decision-Making in the Russian Use of Force in Crimea and Donbas," *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 2016.

[93] Bukkvol, 2016.

[94] "Vladimir Putin Threatened to Hang Georgia Leader 'by the Balls,'" *Telegraph*, November 13, 2008; and Clifford Levy, "The Georgian and Putin: A Hate Story," *New York Times*, April 18, 2008.

Characteristics of Posture Enhancements

The nature and location of specific U.S. and NATO posture enhancements will also likely affect Russian responses. We assessed that the following four characteristics of any enhancement would have the greatest effect on Russian responses: effect on strategic stability, effect on conventional capability, location, and extent of infrastructure improvements that accompany the enhancement. We review each characteristic in detail next.

Effect on Strategic Stability

As discussed earlier, Russia's nuclear arsenal is a vital component of the strategy to ensure Russia's security. Both international relations theory and Russia's past actions and statements suggest that any U.S. or NATO posture enhancements that increase the vulnerability of Russia's nuclear arsenal would likely be met with a strong Russian response.[95]

While Russia could, in principle, react to a deterioration in the security of its nuclear deterrent by behaving either more cooperatively or more aggressively, there are two aspects of Russia's power position that suggest it is likely to adopt the more aggressive response.[96] First, relatively weaker states, as Russia is in comparison with NATO and the United States, often try to compensate for their material disadvantages by using hardline policies to increase their reputation for resolve. They do so not just for the current crisis but because they fear escalating demands from the stronger state (or states) if they appear weak-willed.[97] Second, states that fear that their relative position may be declining (a reasonable fear for a Russia facing substantial long-term economic and demographic challenges) are particularly likely to adopt militarized and competitive behavior if they think that doing so can avert further loss or reverse decline.[98] This line of thinking suggests that if Russia feels that its arsenal is increasingly vulnerable, it may take such steps as increasing alert levels, spending more on nuclear modernization, or undertaking aggressive actions in other areas to discourage potential adversaries from taking the actions that might threaten its arsenal.[99]

While the primary value of Russia's nuclear arsenal for Russian strategy is to ensure the defense of the homeland, Russian leaders may also think that a large, secure nuclear arsenal can encourage U.S. and Western forbearance with regard to other Russian policies in its near abroad.[100] For example, in 2014, as NATO leaders considered their responses to Russian activi-

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[95] For a general discussion of the role of capabilities in the security dilemma, see Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2, January 1978.

[96] The spiral model, a traditional model of the actions of insecure states, expects that Russia's response is more likely to be hardline rather than conciliatory (Jervis, 1976; Charles L. Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy: Expanding and Refining the Spiral and Deterrence Models," *World Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 4, 1992).

[97] Todd S. Sechser, "Goliath's Curse: Coercive Threats and Asymmetric Power," *International Organization*, Vol. 64, No. 4, 2010. For an argument that this logic is motivating Russia's current behavior, see Michael Kofman, "Why the Russian Air Force Keeps Recklessly Testing America's Defenses," War on the Rocks, September 1, 2015.

[98] Dale C. Copeland's case studies focus on states that experience decline from a position of dominance, rather than such states as Russia that are potentially declining from a position of relative weakness. However, the logic of his argument applies to both types of cases (Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001, p. 41).

[99] Lieber and Press, 2006a, p. 10.

[100] Matthew Rojansky, "Russia and Strategic Stability," in Elbridge A. Colby and Michael S. Gerson, eds., *Strategic Stability: Contending Interpretations*, Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2013, pp. 304–312.

ties in Ukraine, Putin stated, "I want to remind you that Russia is one of the leading nuclear powers" and should not be trifled with.[101] Some Russian military thinkers envision a further role for the nuclear arsenal, although this does not appear to be current Russian doctrine. That role has been described as the concept of "escalate to de-escalate," by which Russia would launch a limited nuclear strike during a conventional conflict in order to signal its resolve and compel an enemy to end hostile actions.[102] In the Zapad-99 military exercises, a simulated nuclear first strike was carried out against a hypothetical adversary after Russian conventional units appeared to be on the verge of being overrun.[103] In 2000, the Russian Military Doctrine included language reserving a role for nuclear weapons in defending against a conventional attack "in situations that are critical for the national security of the Russian Federation and its allies."[104] More-recent Russian military exercises have incorporated nuclear forces and nuclear attacks—for example, the Zapad-09 maneuvers purportedly included a nuclear strike on Poland.[105] However, the most-recent iterations of Russian military doctrine appear to have clarified that Russian policy for the employment of nuclear weapons is more conservative: Nuclear weapons will be used only as the response to a strategic attack or a conventional attack threatening the integrity of the Russian state.[106] That said, the willingness of Russian elites, up to and including President Putin, to raise the potential for nuclear escalation at lower thresholds through more-informal means of communication is still noteworthy, as it could signal the potential for formal Russian doctrine to shift in this direction in the future.

There are several specific types of posture and capability enhancements that could threaten strategic stability between Russia and NATO in the years to come. We discuss several of the most prominent types below.

Missile Defense and Prompt Global Strike

Enhancements to U.S. counterforce capabilities, missile defenses, and even more-general capabilities to attack Russian command and control systems could affect the vulnerability of Russia's nuclear arsenal. The United States has repeatedly emphasized that such conventional missile programs as BMD and PGS are aimed at rogue states and terrorist groups. Moreover, U.S. officials have argued, and believe, that these systems simply lack the ability to degrade an arsenal as large as Russia's.[107] Nonetheless, depending on Russia's perceptions of its own nuclear vulnerabilities, Russia may fear that such systems will have at least some effect on the strategic balance.[108]

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101 Colin Freeman, "Vladimir Putin: Don't Mess with Nuclear-Armed Russia," *Telegraph*, August 29, 2014.

102 Olga Oliker, *Russia's Nuclear Doctrine: What We Know, What We Don't, and What That Means*, Washington, D.C.: Center for International and Strategic Studies, 2016a, p. 1.

103 James T. Quinlivan, "Yes, Russia's Military Is Getting More Aggressive," *Foreign Policy*, December 30, 2014; and Jacob W. Kipp, "Russia's Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons," *Military Review*, June 2001.

104 Nikolai Sokov, "Russia's 2000 Military Doctrine," Nuclear Threat Initiative, October 1, 1999.

105 National Institute for Public Policy, *Russia's Nuclear Posture*, Fairfax, Va.: National Institute Press, 2015; and "In Zapad Exercises, Russia Flexes Its Military Strength," Austin, Tex.: Stratfor, September 20, 2013.

106 Oliker, 2016a, p. 4.

107 U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, Washington, D.C., April 2010, p. x; and Bilyana Lilly, "How Putin Uses Missile Defence in Europe to Distract Russian Voters," *NATO Review*, 2015.

108 Lieber and Press, 2006a, p. 10; Barry R. Posen, *Inadvertent Escalation: Conventional War and Nuclear Risks*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Indeed, there is substantial evidence that Russia believes that long-range precision weapons constitute a threat. In 2012, Putin wrote that such systems

> will provide fundamentally new instruments for achieving political and strategic goals in addition to nuclear weapons. Such weapon systems will be as effective as nuclear weapons but will be more "acceptable" from the political and military point of view. Therefore, the strategic balance of nuclear forces will gradually lose its significance in the matter of deterring aggression and chaos.[109]

Writers of Russian strategic literature believe that U.S. and NATO missile defense systems are postured against Russia in an attempt to reduce the effectiveness of its strategic forces and upset strategic stability in favor of the West. There also exist the beliefs that BMD systems are offensive (or that they can be easily repurposed to launch conventional or nuclear strikes) and are being deployed merely as a pretext to position U.S. nuclear forces closer to possible Russian targets.[110] Russia may fear that these systems could then be used for precipitous attacks against Russian command and control systems, including the Russian leadership.[111]

President Putin has routinely attacked the United States' BMD plans and has expressed his doubts about U.S. intentions. Putin states that the rationale for BMD (defending against such states as Iran) is questionable and that BMD can be retooled for offensive operations.[112] Objections to BMD feature heavily in official Russian policy documents as well. The 2013 Russian Foreign Policy Concept views "unilateral arbitrary actions" of BMD formation as compromising "strategic stability and international security."[113] The 2014 Russian Military Doctrine lists BMD as a "military danger" that upsets the nuclear balance.[114]

Russia also fears that it could be a target of U.S. PGS, a set of high-speed, precision conventional weapons. The Russian fear is that a hypothetical U.S. first strike against Russian nuclear weapons or command and control systems using PGS would degrade its deterrent and complicate Russia's response. Russia's only comparable weapons are nuclear, so it would be unable to respond without starting a nuclear exchange.[115] PGS could, in Russia's view, allow the United States to achieve many of the same objectives as nuclear weapons but without the

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[109] Vladimir Putin, "Being Strong: National Security Guarantees for Russia," RT News, February 19, 2012a.

[110] Pavel Zolotarev, "Missile Defense Challenges," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 3, August 9, 2008; V. Kozin, "Osobennosti realizatsii YePAP SShA i reaktsiya Rossii [Specific Features of US EPAA Implementation and Russia's Response]," *Problemy Natsional'noy Strategii*, No. 2, 2013, p. 120; G. Tischenko, "O chyom predpochitayut mnogo ne govorit': SShA sozdayut global'nuyu integrirovannuyu protivovozdushno-protivoraketnuyu oboronu [About Which Many Prefer Not to Talk: The US Is Creating a Global Integrated BMD System]," *Problemy Natsional'noy Strategii*, No. 6, 2015, p. 147; and A. L. Khryapin, D. A. Kalinkin, and V. V. Matvichuk, "Strategic Deterrence Against the U.S. Global ABM System and Prompt Global Strike Capabilities," *Military Thought*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2015, p. 4.

[111] Jeffrey Lewis, "Russia's Nuclear Paranoia Fuels Its Nuclear Propaganda," *Foreign Policy*, August 22, 2016; and Jeffrey Lewis, "Bar Nunn," *Foreign Policy*, October 17, 2012.

[112] "Putin: Romania 'in Crosshairs' After Opening NATO Missile Defense Base," RT News, May 27, 2016; Vladimir Putin, "Meeting of Russian Federation Ambassadors and Permanent Envoys," Moscow, June 30, 2016; and Vladimir Putin, "Putin's Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy," *Washington Post*, February 12, 2007.

[113] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [*Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*], Moscow, February 12, 2013.

[114] Russian Federation, 2014a.

[115] Rojansky, 2013, p. 322.

same level of risk.[116] Another Russian concern is the effect that PGS proliferation could have on current strategic armaments treaties that do not address this new category of weapons.[117] Like BMD, PGS is referred to as a "military danger" in the 2014 Russian Military Doctrine.[118] The 2015 Russian National Security Strategy also takes note of the ability of PGS to undermine strategic stability.[119]

Space Weapons

Russia also sees the deployment of weapons in space as a potential threat to strategic stability, identifying such weapons as another "military danger" enumerated in the 2014 Russian Military Doctrine and a source of instability mentioned by the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept.[120] Russia's concern is that U.S. and NATO research in this area could result in hypersonic unmanned vehicles that can complement PGS weaponry and allow the West to conduct strikes throughout an opponent's territory.[121] Moreover, the lack of a sufficient international regime for the control of space makes an arms race more likely.[122]

Biological Weapons

In the 2015 Russian National Security Strategy, the threat of a "U.S. network of military-biological laboratories" located in post-Soviet countries (including Georgia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan) is mentioned as a threat for the first time in official Russian documents.[123] The Russian Foreign Ministry has leveled criticism at the United States' biological research facilities for, in the view of the ministry's leaders, poor safety records, which endanger global security. Furthermore, Russia believes that these facilities undermine international agreements designed to curtail the proliferation of biological weapons.[124] A more strident Russian view does not discount the possibility that U.S.-sponsored biological facilities in Russia's near abroad are not only unsafe but are military in nature and intentionally aimed at Russia and its citizens.[125] This

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[116] Khryapin, Kalinkin, and Matvichuk, 2015, p. 4.

[117] Y. Goryachyov, "Razrabotka perspektivnogo strategicheskogo neyadernogo vooruzheniya ssha v ramkakh kontseptsii 'global'nyy udar' [The Development of Prospective Strategic Non-Nuclear Weapons of the U.S. Within the Framework of Prompt Global Strike]," *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No. 5, 2012, p. 11.

[118] Russian Federation, 2014a.

[119] "Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot dekabrya goda O Strategii natsional'noy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii [The Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on 31 December 2015 No. 683 'On the Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation']," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, December 31, 2015.

[120] Russian Federation, 2014a; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2013.

[121] Y. Melnik, "Osnovnye napravleniya razvitiya sredstv vozdushnokosmicheskogo napadeniya SShA i NATO [The Main Directions of Development of Aerospace Offensive Weaponry of the U.S. and NATO]," *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No. 8–9, 2015.

[122] V. Kozin, "Problema predotvrashcheniya razmeshcheniya oruzhiya v kosmose: sravnitel'nyy analiz pozitsiy SShA i Rossii [The Problem of Preventing the Deployment of Space-based Weapons: Comparative Analysis of the Positions of the US and Russia]," *Problemy Natsional'noy Strategii*, No. 2, 2012, p. 77; and Matthew Bodner, "Missiles Threaten New Arms Race," *Moscow Times*, February 12, 2015a.

[123] Russian Federation, 2015a; and Olga Oliker, "Unpacking Russia's New National Security Strategy," Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 7, 2016b.

[124] "US Encircling Russia with Bioweapons Labs, Covertly Spreads Them — Russian FM," RT News, June 11, 2015.

[125] D.S. Popov, "SShA formiruyut vokrug Rossii sistemu voennobiologicheskikh ob'ektov [The U.S. Is Forming a System of Military-Biological Objects Around Russia]," Rossiyskiy Institut Strategicheskikh Issledovaniy, April 23, 2014.

charge is ironic, given that the intention of the U.S. program in question is to support non-military, civilian uses of biological skills and technologies.[126]

Other Systems

Russia sees the potential for new threats to strategic stability from NATO capabilities on the horizon as well. Referred to in Russian documents as "weapons based on new physical principles," these new NATO capabilities are still in more-nascent phases of development but, from the Russian perspective, could be vastly more effective than traditional technologies. Examples include geophysical, laser, microwave, acoustic, and gene-based weaponry.[127] Discussions of these prospective weapons do not dominate current Russian military thinking, but they are by no means relegated to the margins. In the 2014 Russian Military Doctrine, the use of "weapons based on new physical principles" is named as a characteristic feature of modern conflict.[128] A 2012 article by Putin mentioned "beam, geophysical, wave, genetic, psychophysical and other types of weapons" in the same context as other, more contemporary weapons that can disrupt the strategic balance.[129]

Effect on Conventional Capability

NATO posture enhancements involving conventional forces have the potential to change the local balance of power in Russia's near abroad. The result of such enhancements could be to strengthen deterrence against a conventional Russian attack and to restrain NATO allies from more-provocative behavior. However, such enhancements could also exacerbate Russia's security concerns in the region and even prompt an aggressive reaction if the enhancements are large enough to be seen as a threat. The need to balance these competing concerns highlights the importance of carefully calibrating the additional capabilities introduced in the region.

A larger conventional NATO force could reduce the risk of conflict or Russian aggression in two ways. First, as discussed earlier, a larger NATO presence could strengthen deterrence. These forces could enhance NATO's capability to deny Russia a quick victory and signal the resolve to do so. These forces might also signal the Alliance's willingness to impose a stiff punishment for any aggression. Second, conventional posture enhancements could reassure nervous NATO allies in Eastern Europe that they are not at risk of being overrun and make it easier to restrain them from taking actions that have the potential to escalate a crisis with Russia.[130]

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[126] Khatuna Mshvidobadze, "Commentary: New Russian Security Strategy," *Defense News*, January 26, 2016; Oliker, 2016b.

[127] E. Batalin, "Sozdanie v SShA oruzhiya na novykh fizicheskikh printsipakh [The Creation of Weapons Based on New Physical Principles in the United States]," *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No. 6, 2015.

[128] Russian Federation, 2014a.

[129] Putin, 2012a.

[130] NATO states could react more aggressively to Russian provocations if they fear they face being rapidly overrun without the time to properly mobilize their own forces or receive reinforcements from other NATO members. For example, these allies may be more likely to employ national air defense systems in the event of Russian airspace incursions. Alternatively, the states may opt to mobilize and forward deploy forces in response to Russian military exercises near their borders if they view doing so as necessary to signal resolve and ensure early NATO mobilization and deployments in case such an exercise is a precursor to a Russian invasion.

On the logic of alliance restraint, see Jeremy Pressman, *Warring Friends: Alliance Restraint in International Politics*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008; Gene Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint: How the United States Thwarted West Germany's Nuclear Ambitions," *International Security*, Vol. 39, No. 4, Spring 2015; Glenn H. Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 1984; Glenn H. Snyder, "Alliance Theory: A

At the same time, conventional posture enhancements have the potential to increase the risk of conflict or Russian aggression by raising questions about NATO's future intentions in the region.[131] For several reasons, Russia might worry that NATO's aims, even if benign now, may later expand. First, NATO members on Russia's periphery, feeling more secure, may be emboldened to adopt more-reckless or more-provocative policies toward Russia.[132] Second, Russia might worry that a small force increase could be the start of a slippery slope that eventually leads to a much more capable NATO force along Russia's border. Enhancements, especially if accompanied by logistical or infrastructure improvements, could be seen as a "down payment" for a more robust presence in the future.[133] Finally, these forces could make inadvertent war with NATO more likely. Having more forces operating in close proximity to one another increases the risk of accidental encounters between Russian and NATO forces. A minor incident could lead to an escalatory action and reaction cycle as each side feels it has to take a hard line to show its resolve to defend its interests.[134] These pathways highlight some of the reasons even NATO posture enhancements that are themselves insufficient to constitute a threat might be viewed by Russia as an ominous signal of NATO's future intentions.

Scholars have pointed to some factors that can ameliorate concerns about future intentions. For example, states can strengthen their defenses without threatening others by selecting military systems that can be distinguished as defensive, rather than offensive, in nature.[135] However, most NATO forces are not clearly defensive; this includes many of the forces that NATO is considering for such locations as the Baltics (for example, heavy ground forces). Moreover, Russia is unlikely to err on the side of assuming that NATO capabilities are defensive in nature. Weaker states face very substantial consequences for failing to detect hostility on the part of a stronger power. Failing to detect and respond to threats could leave that state unprepared for a conflict with a materially superior adversary and put key systems, such as command and control, at risk. This makes such states particularly sensitive to changes in an adversary's policies and much more easily threatened.[136]

Location

The location of forces is also likely to affect how Russia reacts to NATO posture enhancements. As discussed earlier, increases in forces on the territory of NATO members along Russia's border could enhance deterrence both by increasing NATO's ability to resist a Russian attack

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Neorealist First Cut," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 1990; and Thomas J. Christensen, "China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 1999, pp. 50–51.

[131] For a general treatment on how defensive preparations can be seen as an indication of offensive intentions, see Jervis, 1978.

[132] Snyder, 1984, 1990. For an argument that greater U.S. political commitments emboldened Georgia, though not a treaty ally, to adopt more-provocative policies toward Russia prior to the 2008 war with Russia, see Barry R. Posen, "Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 1, 2013.

[133] For a general argument about how forward-deployed forces can lead to lower costs in using forces and more-expansive aims, see Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014.

[134] For a general version of the risks of unintended escalation, see Copeland, 2001, pp. 35–43.

[135] Andrew Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing: Why Security Seekers Do Not Fight Each Other," *Security Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1997; Glaser, 1992, 1997.

[136] Miranda Priebe, *Fear and Frustration: Rising State Perceptions of Threats and Opportunities*, Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2015, pp. 28–34.

and by signaling NATO's willingness to do so, although the extent to which the enhancements bolster deterrence will vary depending on the type of forces involved. Ground forces based in NATO members on Russia's border would most directly increase available NATO capabilities in a crisis, while the contribution of those placed farther from the border would depend on transportation times and readiness levels. These transportation times are, of course, much shorter for air forces. Therefore, air forces are likely to lose less of their value from being based in such countries as Germany than would land forces. Indeed, basing air forces outside of the range of the most lethal of Russia's A2/AD systems could even enhance their utility by making them less vulnerable to attack while on the ground.

Ground forces based in such countries as Estonia or Lithuania, whether rotational or permanent, are also likely to send a clearer signal of NATO's commitment to defend its members than air forces are. Aircraft could much more easily be relocated to other NATO bases in the event of a crisis than could ground forces — and both the NATO ally and Russia would be aware of this fact. Therefore, as a signal of Alliance resolve and commitment, air assets based in NATO members on Russia's borders likely provide less value than comparable ground forces.

However, posture enhancements closer to the Russian border or in symbolically important areas, whether ground or air, could be more likely to stoke a nationalist backlash in Russia and threaten Russian prestige. Similarly, NATO enhancements near areas with a large number of Russian speakers could lead to pressure on Moscow to "defend" co-ethnics.[137]

Building on these general points, it is also important to identify which countries and regions are likely to be of greatest concern to Russia. To begin, past Russian views regarding NATO conventional forces in Eastern Europe suggest greater strategic concern for this region as a whole. The 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act included language that proscribed the "permanent stationing of substantial combat forces" by NATO in Eastern Europe while calling on Russia to maintain a similarly less threatening presence in the region.[138] Russia was also a party to the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty.[139] The CFE Treaty, originally ratified during the latter days of the Cold War, was designed to maintain limits on military equipment deployed in Europe. A 1999 update to the original treaty also included a provision for Russian restraint in its Kaliningrad and Pskov oblasts (its westernmost regions bordering NATO members).[140] Russia viewed these treaties with promise but eventually became disenchanted with them as it became more apprehensive of NATO enlargement.[141]

Even as relations worsened with NATO, however, Russia did make some efforts to renew a mutual understanding regarding the disposition of the two sides' conventional forces. In 2009, Russian officials proposed two new security treaties that would rework the European security infrastructure into a more inclusive (from Russia's perspective) institution. The first, the Draft European Security Treaty, was outlined by then-President Dmitri Medvedev and gave the

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[137] For examples of nationalist backlashes in the past, see Stent, 2015, pp. 25–26.

[138] NATO, Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security Between NATO and the Russian Federation Signed in Paris, France, Brussels, October 12, 2009a.

[139] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, Vienna, November 19, 1990.

[140] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, The Final Act of the Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, Vienna, November 19, 1999.

[141] Mark R. Wilcox, "Russia and the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty) — A Paradigm Change?" *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4, p. 580.

general contours of the new system. A complementary proposal by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, the Agreement Governing Relations Among NATO-Russia Council Member States in the Security Sphere, lists more-detailed regulations for military forces. It calls for abstention from permanent deployments in new NATO states (those which were not Alliance members before the existence of the 1997 Founding Act). Permissible forces would be of roughly brigade size or smaller. Forces exceeding this threshold could not be stationed for longer than 42 days, but larger deployments could be made in extreme circumstances with the consent of other states.[142] While there is no guarantee that current Russian views on NATO forces mirror those from 2009, these proposals provide some evidence of the general nature and scale of forces that Russia may find less threatening: Forces close to Russian territory would be modest in size, transparent, and rotationally deployed.

Notwithstanding these concerns, Russia appears to have given up its historical sphere of influence over most of the states of Eastern Europe. Russia's 2003 withdrawal from Balkan peacekeeping efforts and its muted reaction to the 2004 enlargement of NATO were signs of a changed relationship with its former satellites, although Russian interests in the Balkans certainly persist. Russia tried to repair its political and economic relations with most Eastern European states even after the 2008 Georgia War heightened tensions. Eastern Europe's westward lean was accepted, if begrudgingly, by Russia, and Eastern Europe came to be seen as a business opportunity. Russia has pursued economic projects, notably in the energy sphere, in many Eastern European states.[143] In this regard, Russia's relations with many Eastern European states have become more similar to its relations with Western Europe, with their focus on bilateral ties with select partners and shared economic interests a priority, although security tensions remain, as they do with the rest of the NATO alliance.[144]

For both geographic and political reasons, forces deployed in the Baltics could create more concern for Russia than those deployed elsewhere in Eastern Europe, proportionate to their size and capabilities.[145] The proximity of the Baltic States makes substantial NATO forces

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[142] Richard Weitz, "The Rise and Fall of Medvedev's European Security Treaty," *On Wider Europe* series, Washington, D.C.: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, May 2012; and Patrick Nopens, "A New Security Architecture for Europe? Russian Proposals and Western Reactions Part II," Egmont Security Policy Brief No. 10, April 2010.

[143] Trenin, 2011, pp. 113–115.

[144] Oliker et al., 2009, pp. 108–110.

[145] It is worth noting that, notwithstanding Poland's border with Kaliningrad and the fraught historical relationship, Russia currently appears to view Poland more similarly to other former Warsaw Pact states than it does to the Baltics or other former Soviet states, although this view has evolved over time. In Russia's 1993 Foreign Policy Concept, Central and Eastern Europe were considered part of a historical Russian sphere of interest. Russian politicians also proposed alternative security arrangements for Poland separate from the NATO alliance; Poland, however, thought such plans would threaten its newly won independence. Russia eventually came to grudgingly accept Poland's accession to NATO once it appeared inevitable. After joining NATO, Russian relations with Poland were generally poor, owing to disagreements over such issues as missile defense. Following the 2008 war with Georgia, Russia changed its approach and attempted to reestablish closer relations with Poland. Visits by Putin and Medvedev to Poland—including Katyn, the site of an infamous Soviet massacre of Polish military personnel during World War II—demonstrated the new emphasis on positive ties. As Trenin argues, by the beginning of the 2010s, Russia had begun to see its former Warsaw Pact allies no longer as states within a sphere of influence but as economic partners. While relations have notably deteriorated since the 2014 Ukraine crisis, we did not identify any evidence that Russian policymakers continue to think of Poland as falling within Russia's sphere of influence or as occupying a different place in their strategic thinking from other Central European NATO members. See Elzbieta Stadtmuller, *The Issue of Nato Enlargement in Polish-Russian Relations*, Final Report for NATO Fellowship, 2000–2001, pp. 26–32; Elena Khotkova Sergeevna, "Rossiyskiy faktor vo vneshney politike stran Tsentral'noy i Vostochnoy Yevrope [The Russian Factor in the Foreign Policy of the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe]," *Problemy*

stationed there inherently more threatening to Russia than those stationed farther away from its borders. Politically, the presence of substantial Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia and the Baltic States' status as former parts of the Soviet Union likely give them greater salience for Russian nationalism and, therefore, make NATO forces there more likely to provoke an aggressive response if the Baltics were to become the object of competition between Russia and NATO.[146]

Russia's relationship with the Baltic States in recent years has been different from other Eastern European states, and often negative. From their earliest days of independence, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have had a more tumultuous relationship with Moscow. The issue of withdrawing Russian Federation troops from the Baltic States was the first major controversy—but not the last. The status of sizable Russian ethnic minorities in Estonia and Latvia, the delineation of borders, and transit rights to Kaliningrad through Lithuania have also been long-running disputes.[147] Russia has attempted to exert influence over its Baltic neighbors using a suite of subversive tactics and threatening gestures, including a relentless media and propaganda campaign and numerous airspace violations.[148] Several of these incidents are noted in Appendix B.

That said, while Russia's foreign minister in the early 1990s saw the newly independent states as part of a "post-imperial space" in which Russia should have an "imposing presence," the Baltic States were later able to join NATO, and with relatively minimal controversy.[149] In a joint press conference with U.S. President George W. Bush in 2002, the year the Baltic States were invited to join NATO, Putin reiterated the standard Russian position on NATO expansion but stressed cooperation rather than discord between Russia and the West.[150] Russia's relations with the Baltic States and the West as a whole have since worsened, and Russia's insistence on keeping disputes over Russian minorities, border issues, and transit rights alive suggests that despite the states' NATO membership, Russia remains unwilling to fully relinquish its influence.[151] However, the Baltic States also clearly do not appear to occupy the same place in Russian strategic thinking as other post-Soviet states. The efforts to keep Ukraine and Georgia out of NATO stand in stark contrast to the general acquiescence to Baltic accession, and our review of Russian strategic literature did not identify any lingering interest in detaching the Baltic States from the West.

Natsional'noy Strategii, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2011; Oleg Borisovich Nemenskii, "Rossiyskopol'skie otnosheniya posle Smolenskoy katastrofy [Russian-Polish Relations After the Smolensk Catastrophe]," *Problemy Natsional'noy Strategii*, Vol. 21, No. 6, 2013; and Trenin, 2011, pp. 113–115.

146 As discussed earlier, the influence of Russian nationalism on Russian foreign policy is debated in the literature. While certainly a tool that the state uses, its independent effect on policy may be more limited. See March, 2012; and Laruelle, 2015.

147 Mark Cichock, "Interdependence and Manipulation in the Russian-Baltic Relationship: 1993–1997," *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1999, pp. 92–93.

148 Edward Lucas, *The Coming Storm: Baltic Sea Security Report*, Washington, D.C.: Center for European Policy Analysis, June 2015; and Hedenskog and Larsson, 2007.

149 Cichock, 1999, p. 91.

150 Vladimir Putin, "Joint Press Conference with US President George W. Bush," Moscow, November 22, 2002. This episode is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

151 Vladimir Putin, "Russia and the Changing World," RT News, February 27, 2012b.

Extent of Infrastructure Improvements

NATO infrastructure improvements that accompany posture enhancements could also affect Russian security concerns. In 2012, Putin remarked that "NATO is expanding, moving to the East, and around us bases grow like mushrooms."[152] Russian doctrine has a similarly negative outlook. The positioning of "military infrastructure of NATO member-states in proximity to the borders of the Russian Federation" and the deployment of military forces in any country bordering Russia are cited by the 2010 and 2014 Russian Military Doctrines as "military dangers."[153] Russia's 2015 National Security Strategy calls NATO's growing military potential and development of military infrastructure a threat to national security.[154] In 2005 and 2006, the United States reached agreements with Romania and Bulgaria to create shared bases under the auspices of Joint Task Force East, which envisioned a maximum of 5,000 deployed U.S. troops in these countries, although the number could vary with rotational assignments of forces. President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov both criticized the bases, and Joint Task Force East was specifically cited as one cause of Russia's 2007 CFE Treaty suspension.[155]

Therefore, Russia is likely to view with alarm the creation of military infrastructure close to Russian territory that could be used to support larger deployments of forces in the future or allow for the rapid transportation of large numbers of troops into these countries, well beyond those currently present there. Russian concerns regarding this infrastructure are likely to be proportional to the potential combat capabilities that these improvements represent. Building transportation infrastructure, prepositioning equipment, hardening air base infrastructure, and expanding bases all have the potential to be threatening to Russia, depending on the scale at which they are implemented and the combat power that they would allow NATO to quickly bring to bear in any potential conflict.

Summary of Factors

This chapter has identified 11 key factors that analysts should consider when assessing possible Russian reactions to NATO posture enhancements in Eastern Europe. These factors are summarized in Table 3.1.[156]

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152 "V. Putin potreboval garantiy po YevroPRO [V. Putin Demanded Guarantees on EuroBMD]," RBK News, June 2, 2012.

153 Russian Federation, *Voennaya doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [*The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*], Moscow, February 5, 2010; Russian Federation, 2014a.

154 Russian Federation, 2015a.

155 Dorniel Moldovan, Plamen Pantev, and Matthew Rhodes, *Joint Task Force East and Shared Military Basing in Romania and Bulgaria*, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany: George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, Occasional Paper Series No. 21, August 2009, pp. 19–20.

156 Russian intentions or motivations to pursue a conflict with the United States or other NATO members are naturally central to determining Russian reactions to possible posture enhancements. In this framework, we treat Russian intentions as being informed and shaped by the key factors listed in Table 3.1. Our analysis throughout this report therefore closely scrutinizes the potential for changes in Russian intentions or motivations as a result of the identified key factors, but we do not separate these intentions as a distinct key factor, treating them instead as an intermediate variable.

Table 3.1
Key Factors Likely to Affect Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements

Category	Key Factor
Strategic context	• NATO's relative overall capabilities • NATO's relative local capabilities • Russian perceptions of NATO's intentions • Russian perceptions of NATO's willingness to defend its members against aggression
Russian domestic context	• Extent of threats to regime legitimacy • Relative power and preferences of factions within Russia's elite • Preferences of Vladimir Putin
Characteristics of posture enhancements	• Effect on strategic stability • Effect on conventional capability • Location • Extent of infrastructure improvements

Having identified and described these key factors, it will be useful to see how they apply in specific circumstances. Appendix A describes several case studies of prominent interactions between Russia and NATO over the past 20 years and illustrates how these key factors can be used to better understand Russian behavior and decisions. The next chapter applies these key factors to the current environment, as well as to multiple potential future scenarios.

CHAPTER FOUR

Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements

The preceding chapters and the case studies in Appendix A identify and illustrate key factors that together form a framework that analysts can use to assess potential Russian reactions to U.S. and NATO posture enhancements. In this chapter, we demonstrate how such a framework can be applied, in two different contexts. First, we assess likely Russian reactions, including potential changes in the likelihood of an attack on a NATO member, over the near term (the next one to three years) to U.S. and NATO posture enhancements already proposed or in the process of being implemented. Second, we assess alternative scenarios further in the future and how Russia may respond to additional potential posture enhancements under more dramatically changed circumstances.

In both analyses, we do not aim for precise predictions of Russian behavior. This report relies entirely on publicly available information and is intended to show analysts how the key factors we outline can be used to inform a more detailed, comprehensive assessment of Russian reactions. It is also not designed to identify what specific form Russian reactions might take, particularly reactions short of an attack, but rather to estimate their approximate direction and scale.

Assessing Potential Russian Reactions to In-Progress NATO Posture Enhancements

The 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit announced plans for the most-substantial shifts in U.S. and NATO posture on the Alliance's eastern flank to date, as discussed in Chapter Two. The highlights of these plans were for battalion-sized forces led by key NATO members to be placed on a persistent, rotational basis in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. Notably, given historical events, Germany is to take the lead in the battalion designated for Lithuania, as will the United States for the battalion designated for Poland.[1] The plans also call for standing up a multinational divisional headquarters in Poland and constituting a multinational framework brigade in Romania. U.S. plans announced prior to Warsaw also call for storing the equipment for an ABCT, as well as additional equipment, across NATO's eastern flank.[2] Although the time frame for implementing all of these enhancements was not clear as of this writing, it

[1] The plans indicate that the United Kingdom will lead the battalion in Estonia, and Canada will lead the battalion in Latvia.

[2] White House, "Fact Sheet: The FY2017 European Reassurance Initiative Budget Request," Washington, D.C., February 2, 2016a.

is reasonable to expect that they will occur fairly quickly and be completed over approximately two years, as were most announced proposals from the 2014 NATO Wales Summit.

As of this writing, Russia had sent some signals regarding its possible reactions. In May 2016, as plans for the July Warsaw Summit were being floated in the press, Russia announced posture enhancements of its own, including three additional mechanized divisions in the Western and Southern Military Districts, although it remains unclear to what extent these divisions will be constituted from existing rather than new units.[3] Russia has condemned NATO's proposals, but since the Warsaw Summit, its initial reaction has been muted.[4] However, the implementation of the proposals from Warsaw, and particularly the arrival of larger numbers of U.S. and NATO troops, is likely to constitute another event to which Russian decisionmakers may feel the need to respond. With that in mind, in order to assess likely Russian reactions to these plans, we begin by outlining the current and near-term status of each of the key factors identified in Chapter Three.

Near-Term Strategic Context

As can be seen from the information on NATO member and Russian forces in Chapter Two, the current balance of overall capabilities remains strongly in NATO's favor and is likely to remain so in the near term despite Russian military modernization plans. Many NATO states are also increasing their defense spending after years of decline, and, in any event, the scale of NATO's advantage would be difficult to erode in the near term. In addition, despite the implementation of changes announced at the 2014 Wales Summit and as part of the ERI, the local balance of capabilities in areas on NATO's eastern flank, such as the Baltics, remains strongly in Russia's favor. Even the gradual implementation of the proposals announced at the Warsaw Summit will do little to change this balance, although these changes may have greater operational relevance in certain scenarios that are not assessed here.

Instead, the main effect of the Warsaw Summit and the enhancements announced there appears to be to enhance Russian perceptions of the willingness of NATO members to defend Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland from attack. Given the relative unanimity on this point at the Summit—despite notable political disagreements on other fronts, such as the ongoing refugee crisis and the British vote to exit the EU—it is likely that Russia's perceptions of NATO's willingness to defend the Baltic region have been strengthened. As discussed in Chapter Three, it is also probable that perceptions of NATO's commitments under Article 5 were already high and are most likely to remain so over the near term, although they could be affected by dramatic changes in political leadership in the United States or other key NATO countries.

What are more difficult to discern over the near term using publicly available information are Russian perceptions of U.S. and NATO intentions, both in light of the Warsaw Summit and the broader efforts over the past two years to increase U.S. and NATO rotational presence and infrastructure in the NATO members that border Russia. Russian state-directed media sources continuously paint U.S. and NATO posture enhancements as aggressive moves, but it is difficult to say to what extent these fears regarding U.S. and NATO conventional capabilities

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[3] Marek Menkiszak and Piotr Żochowski, "Russia's Reaction to the NATO Summit in Warsaw," Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich (Centre for Eastern Studies), July 13, 2016.

[4] Łukasz Kulesa, "After the Summit, Will the Russian Bear Roar or Whimper?" European Leadership Network, July 5, 2016.

are shared by senior Russian decisionmakers, such as Putin.[5] In other areas, such as Western support for closer integration with post-Soviet states and the development and construction of European missile defense systems, the evidence that Russian leaders perceive Western intentions to be hostile toward the current Russian regime is more clearly established, as detailed in Chapter Three and Appendix A. These perceptions of, in particular, the United States' generally aggressive intentions in the political and strategic realm seem likely to remain in place in the near term—again, absent a dramatic shift in political leadership in the United States or other key NATO members—and may even be enhanced, as we discuss in more detail when we turn to the specifics of the posture enhancements being implemented.

Near-Term Russian Domestic Context

The current regime in Moscow appears to have a relatively strong hold on power, with no apparent serious threats to Putin's continued control over the country, and popular approval of the President remains high.[6] The September 18, 2016, Duma elections gave a substantial majority of seats to United Russia, the party of President Putin, yielding the party's best performance ever.[7] The elections were marred by very low turnout and allegations of irregularities but nonetheless reflected Putin's control over the country's political system.[8] That said, future elections—and the announcement of their results—still provide focal points for potential protests, whose course may not always be predictable, as seen by the unexpectedly large 2011–2012 protests that followed the previous Duma elections.[9] A presidential election, with Putin almost certain to win, is currently scheduled for 2018, although there have been indications that it may be moved up to avoid holding it in a climate when the economic and fiscal situation could be worse than at present.[10] Putin remains highly popular in Russia, and serious alternative candidates are unlikely to be permitted to run, so while the outcome of the elections may not be in doubt, they still have the potential to coalesce opposition to the legitimacy of the regime, particularly if economic trends worsen over the near term.[11]

The near-term prospects for the Russian economy are relatively poor.[12] Declines in the price of hydrocarbons—and, to a lesser extent, the failure to undertake structural reforms and the imposition of Western sanctions over Ukraine—have inflicted substantial damage to the state budget and the wider economy.[13] To this point, Russia has limited cuts to military spend-

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5 "Russian Media Unhappy with NATO Summit," BBC Monitoring, July 8, 2016.

6 Stephen Sestanovich, "Russia's 2016 Parliamentary Elections: A Putin Scorecard," Council on Foreign Relations, June 14, 2016.

7 Andrew Osborn and Maria Tsvetkova, "Putin Firms Control with Big Win for Russia's Ruling Party," Reuters, September 19, 2016.

8 Valentin Baryshnikov and Robert Coalson, "12 Million Extra Votes for Putin's Party," *Atlantic*, September 21, 2016; Sestanovich, 2016; and Leonid Bershidsky, "Russia Has the Most Boring Election of 2016," Bloomberg View, July 8, 2016.

9 De Vogel, 2013.

10 Ott Ummelas and Henry Meyer, "Kremlin Weighs Early Presidential Vote as Economic Worries Mount," Bloomberg, June 18, 2015.

11 Sergey Aleksashenko, "Should Vladimir Putin Be Concerned About the Russian Economy?" Brookings Institution, February 9, 2016.

12 Kathrin Hille, "Russia: Putin's Balance Sheet," *Financial Times*, April 7, 2016.

13 A more detailed assessment of the relationship among these economic factors is included in the Ukraine case study in Appendix A.

ing and state services by drawing down its reserve funds. By the end of 2017, however, one of Russia's main sovereign funds is likely to be exhausted, raising questions about how long current levels of government spending on pensions and services will be sustainable.[14] These economic concerns are likely to heighten regime worries over the potential for election-related protests in the near term.

Although the Kremlin has recently announced many staffing changes—including, most notably, the replacement of former Chief of the Presidential Administration Sergei Ivanov with Anton Valno—this does not appear to reflect a shift in power between different camps or the ascendency of contrasting viewpoints.[15] Rather, it seems to represent a generational shift within the siloviki, perhaps timed to signal greater vitality and energy leading into the upcoming elections, but not an empowering of notably more-liberal or nationalist figures. Presumably, the lack of any notable ideological shift in these staffing changes reflects continuity in Putin's personal viewpoints as well.

Characteristics of Posture Enhancements

Overall, the posture enhancements announced at the Warsaw Summit and others being implemented as part of the ERI are relatively modest in comparison with the overall balance of NATO and Russian forces, as detailed in Chapter Two. The already announced Russian plans to add more divisions in the Western and Southern Military Districts would, if realized, appear to more than offset any increased NATO capability from the announced rotational battalions and prepositioned equipment.[16] However, there are certain aspects of these NATO enhancements, and others being undertaken concurrently, that may be more notable from the Russian perspective.

The location of many of the proposed enhancements in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania is more threatening from a Russian perspective, not because of the capabilities that these forces would provide but because of the potential precedent they may set for larger forces in the future, and for the deployment of forces on former Soviet territory. Although Russia does not appear to view the Baltics similarly to Ukraine, Belarus, or Georgia in its strategic thinking, these states still appear to represent an area of greater concern than other NATO members in Eastern Europe. Therefore, persistent rotational deployments, including both ground and air forces, and prepositioning of equipment sets in the Baltics likely represent a heightened concern for Russia over similar deployments in, for example, Poland or Romania. The fact that NATO continues to maintain these forces on a persistent rotational basis, rather than as permanent deployments, appears to be intended as a signal to both Russia and certain European NATO allies that Russian concerns are still being taken into account.

While the additional forces for Eastern Europe proposed at the Warsaw Summit do not appear to affect issues of nuclear stability, other NATO projects in the region are highly relevant to Russian perceptions thereof. In the months leading up to Warsaw, NATO announced that it had completed the missile defense site in Romania and was breaking ground on an addi-

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[14] Darya Korsunskaya, "Exclusive: Russia to Empty One of Its Sovereign Funds Next Year—Ministry Proposal," Reuters, July 5, 2016.

[15] Andrew Monaghan, "Putin's Removal of Ivanov as Chief of Staff Is More About Rejuvenation," Chatham House, August 15, 2016.

[16] Indeed, underlining this asymmetry was presumably the purpose of the Russian announcement.

tional site in Poland, slated for completion in 2018.[17] While debates between the United States and Russia over whether missile defense systems represent any threat to Russia's nuclear deterrent are well-worn, Russia has repeatedly made it clear that it feels these systems constitute a long-term threat. Likely reinforcing these perceptions are the timing of the deployment of such systems, coming after the Iran nuclear deal was completed and concurrent with numerous posture enhancements that are designed with Russia in mind, combined with potential interest by the U.S. Congress in expanding the scope of missile defense systems.[18] Russian perceptions of other ongoing programs, such as PGS and U.S. nuclear modernization efforts, likely also heighten Russian concerns over long-term nuclear stability.

Although not a focus of the Warsaw Summit, the United States and NATO are also undertaking infrastructure improvements on the Alliance's eastern flank, funded by both local governments and the United States' ERI.[19] To date, these improvements appear to be, for the most part, relatively modest in scale, including updating existing infrastructure, some of it of variable initial quality, to meet NATO standards.[20] Large-scale bases that could accommodate substantially greater numbers of U.S. or NATO forces are not being built, and transportation improvements that could allow more-substantial forces to flow into the region appear to be moving ahead only slowly. Infrastructure improvements to date in Eastern Europe therefore do not appear to represent a substantial concern for Russia that goes beyond the deployment of U.S. and NATO forces there.

Assessment of Likely Russian Reactions to Ongoing NATO Posture Enhancements

Overall, our analysis suggests that the likelihood of a direct Russian attack on a NATO member over the near term was relatively low before the recent round of U.S. and NATO posture enhancements, and these enhancements have likely helped to reduce it further. This assessment is based on a consideration of each of the key factors discussed in Chapter Three. Table 4.1 summarizes our discussion of Russian reactions to near-term NATO posture enhancements.

It is important to note, however, that some factors indicate a higher or increasing risk of an aggressive Russian response other than a direct attack on a NATO member. Russian elites appear to have increasingly concluded that U.S. and NATO long-term goals are not compatible with the security of the current regime in Moscow. Russian leaders have noted with concern such factors as the steady conventional posture enhancements in Eastern Europe (now including former Soviet territory), BMD systems, and the increasingly Western orientation of states that Russia views as clearly within its sphere of influence. All of these suggest to Moscow that, although the United States and NATO can likely be militarily deterred from attacking Russia directly, the prospects for a stable, long-term accommodation—one that includes mutual acceptance of the validity of expressed Russian security concerns, including political threats to Russian regime stability—appear limited. This perception, if not reversed, represents an unstable feature of the European security order that increases the risk of conflict in the long run.

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17 Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia Calls New U.S. Missile Defense System a 'Direct Threat,'" *New York Times*, May 12, 2016a.

18 "Ballistic Missile Defense: What's in a Word?" *Defense News*, June 24, 2016.

19 White House, 2016a.

20 Mark Edwardson, "In Defence of Europe: Nato Soldiers Head to Latvia," BBC News, October 8, 2014.

Table 4.1
Status of the Key Factors Likely to Affect Russian Reactions to Near-Term NATO Posture Enhancements

Category	Key Factor	Status
Strategic context	• NATO's relative overall capabilities	• Substantial imbalance across multiple dimensions in NATO's favor, excluding rough nuclear parity
	• NATO's relative local capabilities	• Large imbalance in Russia's favor in the Baltics, less pronounced imbalance or parity elsewhere in Eastern Europe
	• Russian perceptions of NATO's intentions	• Increasing perceptions of long-term hostility, but does not appear to include perceptions of potential for short-term aggression
	• Russian perceptions of NATO's willingness to defend its members against aggression	• Perceptions are likely that NATO commitments are strong, particularly in the wake of the Warsaw Summit
Russian domestic context	• Extent of threats to regime legitimacy	• Limited in the near term, but with potential to grow, particularly with recent sharp declines in the economy and state budgets
	• Relative power and preferences of factions within Russia's elite	• Likely to remain dominated by the siloviki and interested in maximizing Russian power, but not otherwise especially ideological
	• Preferences of Vladimir Putin	• Similar to the siloviki; willing to use force and take risks to secure Russian interests, but very sensitive to military costs and cautious regarding the potential for direct conflict with NATO
Characteristics of posture enhancements	• Effect on strategic stability	• Warsaw 2016 changes are likely to have limited effect, but additional BMD sites appear to increase Russian concerns
	• Effect on conventional capability	• Warsaw 2016 changes are not likely to affect overall Russian advantages in the Baltics
	• Location	• Introduction of more substantial NATO troops into the Baltics is a concern for Russia, though less so than any similar actions in Ukraine, Georgia, or Belarus
	• Extent of infrastructure improvements	• Warsaw Summit and ERI changes appear to be limited in scale thus far

In addition, while the regime in Moscow is currently relatively stable, there are short- and long-term threats there as well, most notably the country's poor economic performance, uncertainty regarding a post-Putin leadership, and the potential for more virulent nationalists to become a more powerful political force. These concerns are discussed in more detail later, when we discuss possible future scenarios for Russia.

Against these risks, however, are key factors that make it highly unlikely that Russia would directly attack a NATO member in response to posture enhancements along the lines of those proposed at Warsaw. Most importantly, NATO retains a large edge in overall conventional capabilities, and recent actions have strongly signaled that NATO, and the United States in particular, would respond militarily to any aggression against the Baltic States or other NATO allies where posture enhancements are being implemented. Therefore, it is highly likely that Russia perceives that any aggressive actions sufficient to trigger Article 5 would result in direct conflict with, at a minimum, the United States (again, absent any substantial

changes in political leadership in the United States or other key NATO members that could shift those countries' commitments to Article 5). In addition, Russia retains substantial defensive capabilities of its own, particularly its nuclear deterrent, which should minimize fears that the relatively modest NATO posture enhancements currently in progress would be used for direct aggression against Russian territory in the near term.

Furthermore, there is currently little evidence that Russia is interested in such a conflict with the United States or NATO. Russia does not appear to count any current NATO territory, including the Baltic States, within the sphere where it is willing to use force to preserve its influence. Although Russia has taken numerous aggressive actions in post-Soviet states since 2014, and indeed since 2008, and has undertaken numerous lower-level provocations involving NATO allies, it has taken no actions that approach announced U.S. or NATO redlines that would trigger Article 5. Moreover, even in the aggressions that it has undertaken, such as in Ukraine, Russia's behavior appears to have been highly sensitive to military costs. Responding directly and aggressively to NATO posture enhancements that do not shift the overall local balance of capabilities on Russia's borders would represent a level of cost and risk acceptance that has no precedence in prior Russian behavior.

That said, while a conventional Russian attack on NATO in the near term is highly unlikely, it also seems probable that Russia will explore other avenues to signal its displeasure with ongoing NATO posture enhancements and its resolve to resist further threats to its interests. Furthermore, Russia has an incentive to ensure that its response is perceived as substantial enough to affect NATO's calculation for whether further posture enhancements are advisable. As for what shape such a response could take, Russia has already signaled that it intends to adjust its domestic force posture, as discussed earlier. In the recent past, Russia has used a variety of mechanisms to respond to NATO actions that it perceives as threatening; such mechanisms include withdrawing from multilateral security treaties, sending forces for provocative out-of-area deployments in the Americas, and threatening to base Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad, among others. A more comprehensive review of such historical responses can be seen in Appendix B. Certainly, ongoing low-level provocations involving Russian air forces constitute one way in which Russia is attempting to signal its concerns. Other options to protest NATO's enhancements in the near term could include targeting cross-domain areas of asymmetric concern to the United States and NATO, such as the implementation of the Iran nuclear deal, increasing support for far-right Western political parties, and cyber attacks on politically or economically sensitive Western targets.

Assessing Potential Russian Reactions to Future NATO Posture Enhancements

If tensions between Russia and NATO remain high, the plans being implemented from the Warsaw Summit and the ERI likely will not be the end of U.S. and NATO posture enhancements on the Alliance's eastern flank. Chapter Two summarized proposals for further posture enhancements that, while not currently in process, could be implemented over the next decade. Over this longer time frame, however, the strategic and Russian domestic context in which these enhancements could be implemented may shift as well. In order to properly assess likely Russian reactions to such longer-term, more-substantial shifts in NATO posture, it is useful to first assess how these underlying strategic and political conditions are likely to shift over time. What is the future in which such posture enhancements might be implemented?

In assessing likely Russian reactions to future enhancements, it is important to consider multiple possible futures. Future events may diverge sharply from past patterns of behavior, and it may be difficult to predict the direction of this divergence. To this point, our analysis has emphasized average-case or most likely outcomes, but as we consider further into the future, policymakers must prepare for scenarios that may not be likely but that are plausible and would threaten vital interests were they to come to pass. For these purposes, scenario analysis can be helpful. Scenario analysis seeks to discern not only the most likely futures but also less likely but plausible alternatives that would challenge current policies.[21]

In our scenario analysis, we first discuss what the future would look like if trends in the strategic and Russian domestic context continue on their current trajectories. We then explore conditions under which these trends might change over the next decade, with a focus on changes that could make a conflict between NATO and Russia more likely. Although less conflictual futures than the status quo may be equally likely, they pose less risk for policymakers.[22] Finally, we examine how alternative posture decisions would affect the risk of an aggressive Russian reaction in our three future scenarios.

The Baseline Future: Continuation of Current Trends

As described earlier, several features of the present situation make a direct, aggressive Russian reaction (such as a conventional attack) to ongoing NATO posture enhancements unlikely in the near term. Russia appears to perceive a strong commitment from NATO to defend its eastern members, and the overall balance of capabilities between Russia and NATO appears to be heavily in NATO's favor. Domestically, Putin appears to have consolidated power, and there is currently little effective opposition to his rule, either from within the ranks of the elites on whom he depends or from outside the regime.[23] Russia is suffering from economic decline, but strong actions by the government and central bank appear to have forestalled a crisis for the near term. Russia is paying a price for its actions in both Ukraine and Syria, but the direct costs of its military activities are low, and the indirect costs (in terms of Western sanctions for Russia's violations of Ukrainian territorial integrity and potential increases in radical Islamic terrorism related to its actions in Syria) seem bearable, at least for now.

In this section, we review the key factors that underpin the status quo and discuss how they are most likely to evolve over the next decade.

Strategic Context

The overall balance of capabilities between Russia and NATO is unlikely to change dramatically over the next decade. Russia's military modernization program is likely to continue, which will increase Russian capabilities and provide forces with more-modern equipment, although the pace at which this effort will proceed will be substantially affected by the fiscal environ-

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[21] Paul K. Davis and Zalmay M. Khalilzad, *A Composite Approach to Air Force Planning*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-787-AF, 1996.

[22] This is not to say that it would not be valuable to analyze less-conflictual futures, particularly the potential for NATO posture enhancements to make such futures more or less likely to come to pass. However, the primary risk in more-optimistic futures would appear to be unnecessary NATO expenditures. In more-conflictual futures, the primary risk would be the potential for direct conflict between Russia and NATO. Given the limited scope of this report, we focused on these higher-consequence, riskier scenarios. In doing so, however, we do not assess that they are more likely to come about than futures in which the risk of conflict between Russia and NATO recedes.

[23] Andrew E. Kramer, "More of Kremlin's Opponents Are Ending Up Dead," *New York Times*, August 20, 2016b.

ment.[24] Russia's ability to maintain spending on modernizing its strategic nuclear deterrent may be particularly important to watch, given the age of many of these weapons and Russia's heavy reliance on its nuclear deterrent for its security.[25]

While Russian capabilities are likely to continue to increase over this period, non-U.S. NATO defense spending has also begun to trend upward for the first time in years, and several key states have credibly pledged that these increases will continue in the years to come.[26] Given the current overall gap between NATO and Russian capabilities and likely increased spending on both sides, dramatic shifts in the overall conventional balance appear unlikely. The balance of local capabilities in such regions as the Baltics may, of course, shift more substantially depending on which additional posture enhancements NATO members pursue, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Russian perceptions of NATO, and particularly U.S., intentions seem most likely to continue to deteriorate in the years to come. Plans to deploy forces closer to Russia's borders, to construct additional BMD sites in Europe, and to continue to support eventual NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia stack the deck against any Russian reassessment that NATO is a benign actor. While sharply different political leadership in the United States or other key NATO members could shift Russia's assessment by altering or abandoning these plans, doing so would represent a notable break with historical U.S. and NATO policy. Meanwhile, Russia perceiving a marked decline in NATO's willingness to defend its eastern members also appears unlikely, but we assess this with greater uncertainty. In 2016, rhetorical commitment to collective defense appeared strong among most NATO member governments, particularly the United States.[27] However, public opinion, especially in many European states, appears much less firmly committed to Article 5.[28] Over the next decade, the potential for such views to become reflected in government policies in key NATO members cannot be discounted. What remains to be seen is how the practice of participating more actively in collective defense—such as through the NATO rotational battalions in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland—might shift the politics in participating countries with regard to their NATO commitments.

Russian Domestic Context

The stability of the Russian regime over the next decade could be affected by both economic and political factors. Going forward, Russia faces a difficult economic and fiscal situation, but not necessarily a catastrophic one.[29] Many analysts predict that oil and gas prices are likely to stabilize (though not necessarily rebound) in the years to come: Demand for hydrocarbons has

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[24] Steven Pifer, "Pay Attention, America: Russia Is Upgrading Its Military," *National Interest*, February 3, 2016.

[25] Eugene Miasnikov, "Modernization and 'Zero': Compatible Tendencies?" *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Development and Disarmament Roundtable, January 7, 2015.

[26] Lars Hoffmann, "German Defense Spending Hike Reflects Regional Trend," *Defense News*, March 24, 2016.

[27] White House, 2014c; and Jeffrey Goldberg, "It's Official: Hillary Clinton Is Running Against Vladimir Putin," *Atlantic*, July 21, 2016.

[28] Germany, critically, appears to currently have the largest divergence between a government policy strongly committed to collective defense, including a willingness to lead the NATO battalion slated for rotational deployment to Lithuania, and a much less supportive public. See Bruce Stokes, "Views of NATO and Its Role Are Mixed in U.S., Other Member Nations," Pew Research Center, March 28, 2016.

[29] Keith Crane, Shanthi Nataraj, Patrick B. Johnston, and Gursel Rafig oglu Aliyev, *Russia's Medium-Term Economic Prospects*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1468-RC, 2016.

continued to grow through the period of low oil and gas prices in 2015 and 2016, while supply has leveled off, finally bringing the two into balance in the present and likely for the next several years.[30] Although Russian gross domestic product was expected to contract by more than 5 percent by the end of 2016, the World Bank estimates that growth is likely to resume in 2017 and continue thereafter, albeit at very slow rates.[31]

The Russian state's extreme dependence on hydrocarbons for government revenues means that the government is likely to face severe fiscal constraints for many years to come if relatively low prices continue. In 2015, Russia's official deficit increased to 2.4 percent of gross domestic product—not an enormous number in and of itself, but difficult to sustain. To offset this deficit, the government has drawn down its Reserve Fund by almost half in addition to cutting spending.[32] In the coming years, these fiscal constraints will make it extremely difficult for the state to lead efforts to diversify the Russian economy beyond its reliance on fossil fuels and other commodity exports.[33] It will also almost certainly lead to underinvestment in education, health care, and other social services, and it is likely to thwart Russia's announced plans to make further large increases in defense expenditures.[34] Unless Russia benefits from a substantial rebound in oil and gas prices, it will likely have to restrict government spending considerably more in the coming years.

Further into the future, the Russian economy faces considerable headwinds. For starters, it faces long-term population decline, partially offset by immigration from other post-Soviet countries, and a loss of skills in its workforce (partly because of its underinvestment in education and partly because of its dependence on low-skill immigrants to offset a declining Russian population).[35] Additionally, actors around the world are making ever-greater investments in renewable energy—investments that may make Russia's single largest export sector and the current basis of half of government revenue increasingly less valuable. Finally, endemic corruption acts as a major tax on productive activities in Russia; even before oil and gas prices began their precipitous decline in 2014, the Russian economy had slowed considerably because of the burden of corruption and inefficient investments.[36]

As discussed in Chapter Three, political power has become highly concentrated around Putin and his inner circle. Although such hyper-centralization of power can be highly stable in the short run, it carries substantial risks of instability over longer periods.[37] The Russian "power vertical," with its highly centralized decisionmaking and weak rule of law, risks degrading Russian institutions over the long run, making them more fragile and less able to respond to

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[30] See, for instance, International Energy Agency, *Medium-Term Oil Market Report 2015*, Paris, 2015.

[31] World Bank of the Russian Federation, *Russia Economic Report: The Long Road to Recovery*, Moscow, No. 35, April 2016.

[32] World Bank of the Russian Federation, 2016.

[33] Andrey Movchan, "What Can We Learn from Russia's 2016 Budget Proposal?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 19, 2015.

[34] "Russia Will Cut Defense Budget by 5 Percent in 2016, RIA Reports," Reuters, March 6, 2016.

[35] Sergey Aleksashenko, "The Russian Economy in 2050: Heading for Labor-Based Stagnation," Brookings Institution, April 2, 2015; and Maria Lipman and Nikolay Petrov, "The Future of Domestic Politics, in Hiski Haukkala and Nicu Popescu, eds., *Russian Futures: Horizon 2025*, Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, March 2016, p. 21.

[36] Vladislav Inozemtsev and Yulia Zhuchkova, "The Future of the Economy and the Energy Sector," in Hiski Haukkala and Nicu Popescu, eds., *Russian Futures: Horizon 2025*, Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, March 2016.

[37] Nikolay Petrov, Maria Lipman, and Henry E. Hale, "Three Dilemmas of Hybrid Governance: Russia from Putin to Putin," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2013.

shocks without collapsing. Indeed, recent public opinion polling suggests that more Russians now believe that Russia is more unstable than at any time in the past decade.[38] Such instability has not yet manifested itself in divergent elite preferences. Indeed, given the strain that Western sanctions were intended to impose on Russian elites, the continued near unanimity of elite support for the Kremlin's recent confrontational policies is notable.

Further, if greater divergence among elites were to occur over this period and different actors were to gain greater control over policy, Russia may become more confrontational toward the United States and NATO. Indeed, heavy reliance on nationalism in state-run media as the rationale for Kremlin policy and as justification for why ordinary Russians are experiencing economic pain risks hardening virulent anti-Western attitudes among both elites and the broader population. To the extent that such attitudes can continue to be modulated to allow for pragmatic accommodation with the United States and other NATO members when the Kremlin desires, they are useful to the regime. If they become sufficiently strong that Moscow risks a backlash for making such accommodations, even when doing so would further Russian interests, then they begin to affect policy in ways that could prove destabilizing.

The potential for divergence in Russian policy becomes greatly magnified if Putin is no longer the primary decisionmaker. While reelection to another six-year term starting in 2018 appears to be by far the most likely scenario, whether Putin would seek to either amend the Russian Constitution to run again in 2024 or rotate power with a chosen successor remains unclear. Given the tremendous centralization of Russian decisionmaking that Putin has overseen, the views and identity of his eventual successor have the potential to substantially shift Russian policy.

Summarizing the Baseline Scenario

Many of the key factors related to the strategic and Russian domestic contexts that affect Russian decisionmaking are likely to continue in their current directions over the next decade. For a brief summary of each key factor in this baseline scenario, see Table 4.2.

Most notably, the overall strategic balance appears likely to persist, and as of this writing, a sharp decline in NATO's commitment to defend its members in Eastern Europe appears unlikely. Provided that Russian leaders continue to believe that their nuclear arsenal gives Russia an effective deterrent to any hostile NATO intentions that it may perceive, these strategic factors are likely to continue to act as a stabilizing force in Russia-NATO relations, reducing the risk of direct conflict.[39] Inside Russia, Putin is likely to remain in power and continue to pursue a suspicious, opportunistic, and ultimately pragmatic approach to the West. However, there is greater uncertainty regarding the potential for destabilizing developments if Putin were no longer the ultimate decisionmaker in Russia. Nationalist and anti-Western sentiment has metastasized, particularly among the current foreign and security policy elite. It is not at all clear that a potential successor to Putin recruited from within the ranks of the siloviki would be more moderate. Indeed, although a successor to Putin is unlikely to emerge over the next decade, when one eventually does, that person may well be more confrontational.

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[38] Public Opinion Foundation, "Stabil'nost' ili reformy? [Stability or Reforms?]," July 22, 2016.

[39] Risk factors for Russian perceptions of an erosion in Russia's security include an inability to spend on nuclear modernization, a decline in assessments of the reliability of Russia's strategic forces, and any substantial increases in the scope or technical capabilities of U.S. missile defense systems.

Table 4.2
Key Strategic and Russian Domestic Factors, Baseline Scenario

Category	Key Factor	Status
Strategic context	• NATO's relative overall capabilities	• Overall conventional NATO advantage likely to persist, some concern regarding maintenance of rough nuclear parity depending on Russian modernization plans
	• NATO's relative local capabilities	• Currently planned NATO posture enhancements unlikely to shift local balance away from Russia
	• Russian perceptions of NATO's intentions	• Russia likely to continue to perceive NATO as ultimately hostile, particularly if further improvements to NATO posture and BMD capabilities in Europe are implemented
	• Russian perceptions of NATO's willingness to defend its members against aggression	• Perceptions are likely that willingness remains strong, but with greater uncertainty given divergence between elite and public opinion in some key NATO members
Russian domestic context	• Extent of threats to regime legitimacy	• Likely limited, but with potential to increase, given risks of being seen as insufficiently responsive to economic losses and nationalist goals
	• Relative power and preferences of factions within Russia's elite	• Likely to remain dominated by the siloviki, with some potential for greater prevalence of harder-line nationalist views
	• Preferences of Vladimir Putin	• Likely to remain similar

Higher-Risk Alternative Futures

As discussed earlier, it is important to consider not only the most likely scenario but also less likely but plausible ones that would involve substantially greater risks if they came to pass. This section details two alternative scenarios that have the potential to materially increase the risk of direct confrontation between Russia and NATO by affecting one or more of the identified key factors. The first scenario, labeled *Russia Lashes Out*, focuses on changes to Russian regime legitimacy or elite preferences, most likely triggered by economic shifts. The second scenario, labeled *Weakened West*, focuses on changes in Russian perceptions of NATO's willingness or ability to defend its eastern members, triggered by either Western political developments or external crises. Although these alternative futures are presented as distinct scenarios, in practice, aspects of the two could easily merge. As we have noted, we developed these scenarios precisely to illustrate plausible, though unlikely, pathways to a greater risk of conflict between Russia and NATO.

Russia Lashes Out

The Baltics hold relatively little intrinsic value for Russia. They do not offer Russia sizable economic gains of any kind—neither natural resources nor even a greater market and labor base, even if their populations could be reincorporated into Russia as they once were into the Soviet Union. So long as Russia is guaranteed access to the Kaliningrad oblast, the Baltics offer few, if any, strategic advantages that Russia does not already have. The value of the Baltics to Russia, in fact, is almost entirely symbolic. Both Latvia and Estonia have substantial Russian-speaking minorities, and the need to protect such minorities is increasingly highlighted in Russian propaganda. Further, the Baltics are currently NATO members, so to the extent that Russia can score foreign policy successes against the Baltics, it can serve to weaken NATO's prestige and

influence in Russia's near abroad and simultaneously appeal to nationalist and anti-Western sentiment in Russia.

However, to date, Russia has shown little willingness to bear high military or political costs to score successes against Ukraine, which is strategically, economically, and symbolically much more important to Russia. Ukraine has sizable markets and economic infrastructure that make it a valuable economic prize. It has access to warm-water ports, making it an important strategic asset. And whereas the Baltic countries were always considered somewhat alien territory even in the Soviet period, the Russians have never drawn as sharp a distinction between themselves and Ukrainians.[40] Despite the high value Russia places on Ukraine, it has been extremely careful to limit the noneconomic price it has paid for its aggression in that country. It has minimized the number of casualties among Russian uniformed forces (and media coverage of these casualties) and has sought to hide its role in the conflict in eastern Ukraine.[41]

Nevertheless, changes to Russia's domestic political situation have the potential to shift Russia's calculus regarding the costs it might be willing to bear from a conflict involving the Baltics. Perhaps the most likely scenario to shift this calculus lies in the growing economic troubles of the Russian government and the increasing fragility of the regime. Unless hydrocarbon prices rebound, Russia will eventually need to bring its budget into alignment by slashing government spending. Yet the regime is already contending with a certain degree of popular discontent (masked by a "rally effect" from its muscular foreign policy). It is entirely possible that the regime could misjudge the public's reaction to reduced social spending and economic decline and face large-scale anti-regime activity.[42] Facing revolt, even careful, calculating leaders might be willing to take extreme gambles to remain in office, especially because being toppled from power would almost certainly mean imprisonment for corruption charges, at a minimum. Under these circumstances, diversionary war may become an appealing option, despite the risks.

More-extremist, risk-acceptant leaders could also come to power during the course of tumultuous political upheavals. Despite the risks that Russia has taken in Ukraine, Putin and his close advisers appear to make very careful cost-benefit calculations. But not all of the hardliners in Russia may be so careful. With nationalist and virulently anti-Western discourse flourishing in Russia, a post-Putin era may see leaders with extreme views gain more influence. Such leaders may doubt the willingness of the West to come to the Baltics' aid. They may also place a higher value on restoring Russian greatness on the international stage. Such a scenario seems highly unlikely over this period, but it cannot be ruled out.[43]

It is possible that political tumult could weaken political power structures to such an extent that civilian control of the military might no longer be assured. At least in some accounts, the Slatina airfield standoff at the end of the Kosovo crisis in 1999 was precipitated by lower-level Russian soldiers who acted without the approval or even knowledge of the

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[40] David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998.

[41] See Chapters Three and Four for a fuller discussion.

[42] See, for instance, Petrov, Lipman, and Hale, 2013.

[43] See, for instance, Gaddy and O'Hanlon, 2015, pp. 205–211.

highest levels of the Russian government.[44] Similarly, the hardest-line elements of the siloviki might provoke a confrontation with the United States or NATO without having secured high-level approval in advance.

Alternatively, a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO could be precipitated by international rather than domestic dynamics. Although it is unlikely, Russian decisionmakers facing potential military or even symbolic losses in one context (for instance, a decision by the United States to provide arms to the government of Ukraine) might resort to "horizontal escalation" — that is, raising the stakes of the initial confrontation by initiating a crisis elsewhere. For example, Russian leaders might place the NATO members of the Baltics at risk in an effort to compel the United States to de-escalate elsewhere.

For a brief summary of each key factor in this scenario, see Table 4.3.

Weakened West

While the previous scenario focused on how changes in Russian perceptions of the benefits of a direct confrontation with NATO could increase the risk of conflict, this scenario focuses on the potential for changes in Russian perceptions of the costs of such an action. These scenarios are certainly not mutually exclusive; indeed, for a direct conflict to occur, elements of both scenarios would likely be required. That said, this scenario focuses on how Russian assessments of the costs of conflict with NATO could be diminished if Russia's perceptions of NATO unity or capabilities were to be greatly weakened.

At least two developments might lead to a weakened NATO deterrent in potential flashpoints, such as the Baltics. First, the United States might have committed the bulk of its military capabilities to a war elsewhere, leaving few forces to respond quickly to a potential conflict in Eastern Europe. This contingency is a central premise of many of the force-sizing

Table 4.3
Key Strategic and Russian Domestic Factors, Russia Lashes Out Scenario

Category	Key Factor	Status
Strategic context	• NATO's relative overall capabilities	• Similar to baseline scenario
	• NATO's relative local capabilities	• Similar to baseline scenario
	• Russian perceptions of NATO's intentions	• Russian decisionmakers more likely to perceive aggressive NATO intentions
	• Russian perceptions of NATO's willingness to defend its members against aggression	• Perceptions that willingness is potentially decreased relative to the baseline scenario because of chauvinistic perceptions of Western decisionmakers
Russian domestic context	• Extent of threats to regime legitimacy	• Sharply increased relative to baseline scenario, potentially because of economic or fiscal collapse
	• Relative power and preferences of factions within Russia's elite	• Likely shift toward greater prevalence of hardline nationalist views
	• Preferences of Vladimir Putin	• Willing to take greater risks to maintain hold on power, or potentially replaced by less-pragmatic leader

[44] Stent, 2015, p. 42.

constructs that the United States has used for its force planning. Second, public — or even elite — opinion in Europe or the United States might become heavily divided over the question of the NATO Article 5 guarantee. The EU might be plunged into a deep economic crisis, or it might be unraveling beneath the weight of various nationalist or populist impulses (potentially encouraged or funded by Russia). The same disruptions could also occur in the United States. A preoccupied and divided NATO alliance might be unable or unwilling to signal that it will confront a nuclear-armed Russia over aggression against one of its members, particularly if the other NATO members were to assess that Russian goals were limited. In such a scenario, some countries (e.g., Germany) might view such actions as a refusal to become a logistics hub for U.S. forces as helping to prevent a wider conflict. Other NATO-member governments with closer ties to Moscow might publicly or privately dissent from the Alliance's collective defense goals. For Russian incentives to shift, all that would be required is a perception in Moscow that robust Alliance support would not be forthcoming — plus a willingness to gamble accordingly. In either of these cases, Russian estimates of NATO's ability and willingness to resist might be further diminished if Russian decisionmakers believe they could obfuscate Russian culpability in the early stages of a crisis — for instance, through processes of subversion at least somewhat analogous to Russian actions in eastern Ukraine (Table 4.4).[45]

Table 4.4
Key Strategic and Russian Domestic Factors, Weakened West Scenario

Category	Key Factor	Status
Strategic context	• NATO's relative overall capabilities	• Potentially diminished by U.S. or NATO involvement in conflict outside the region
	• NATO's relative local capabilities	• Potentially shifted further in Russia's favor by U.S. or NATO involvement in conflict outside the region
	• Russian perceptions of NATO's intentions	• Likely similar to baseline scenario
	• Russian perceptions of NATO's willingness to defend its members against aggression	• Perceptions that willingness is sharply diminished by economic or political distractions
Russian domestic context	• Extent of threats to regime legitimacy	• Could be similar to either baseline or Russia Lashes Out scenarios
	• Relative power and preferences of factions within Russia's elite	• Could be similar to either baseline or Russia Lashes Out scenarios
	• Preferences of Vladimir Putin	• Could be similar to either baseline or Russia Lashes Out scenarios

[45] Many are skeptical that a "little green men" scenario is realistic in the Baltics (the term was first employed in this context in 2014 when Russian soldiers in unmarked uniforms blockaded roads and seized strategic locations on the Crimean peninsula). The scenario is offered here only as a possibility, not as a likely strategy. In any event, its utility would likely be greatest if employed as a precursor to a later conventional attack rather than as a stand-alone action. For an assessment of the potential utility of Russian unconventional warfare opportunities in the Baltics, see Henrik Praks, *Hybrid or Not: Deterring and Defeating Russia's Ways of Warfare in the Baltics – The Case of Estonia*, Rome: NATO Defense College, NATO Research Paper No. 124, December 2015; and Jānis Bērziņš, *Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense Policy*, Riga: National Defence Academy of Latvia, Center for Security and Strategic Research, Policy Paper No. 2, April 2014.

Alternative Futures as a Planning Tool

Neither of these alternative scenarios is necessarily likely. As noted earlier, the single most likely scenario is that existing strategic and political trends continue and that, although certain risks of conflict increase somewhat, Russia, the United States, and the rest of NATO muddle through over the next decade without sparking a major crisis. In this future, the two sides find some areas where cooperation is possible, but for the most part, they seek simply to manage a difficult relationship at the lowest possible cost while leaving some opening for gradual improvements if more-cooperative relations become realistic.[46] But even though it is impossible to attach precise probability estimates to more dire alternative futures, they are sufficiently plausible to warrant careful consideration by defense planners charged with developing U.S. and NATO force posture options for Europe. Therefore, next, we assess possible Russian reactions to potential U.S. and NATO posture enhancements a decade out under all three of the future scenarios we have developed.

Assessing Potential Russian Reactions to Proposed Posture Enhancements in Alternative Future Scenarios

In Chapter Two, we summarized numerous proposals for U.S. and NATO posture enhancements that would take some years to come to fruition. While that was by no means an exhaustive list, these proposals include a diverse set of options for how policymakers may later decide to enhance the Alliance's posture on its eastern flank. In this section, we assess potential Russian reactions to these proposals in each of our three future scenarios.

Each of the holistic proposals outlined in Chapter Two included a different mix of force posture enhancements designed to address NATO vulnerabilities. Many of the proposals include common elements, such as the recommendation for U.S. ABCTs to be deployed to the Baltics.[47] In this section, we analyze each of these elements separately. Doing so allows us to clarify the elements of each proposal that are likely to have the greatest effect on the likelihood of an aggressive Russian reaction. Moreover, this approach is more flexible, illustrating how other analysts could assess whether the specific posture enhancements they are considering have similar characteristics to the representative examples we assess.

Our analysis clarifies the characteristics of each enhancement that are likely to increase or decrease the likelihood of a Russian attack on a NATO member (or a similar aggressive Russian reaction). As discussed in Chapter Three, we assessed that the four characteristics that would likely be most salient are the effect on strategic stability, effect on conventional capability, location, and extent of infrastructure improvements.

In Table 4.5, we list the five main proposed posture enhancements and the four key characteristics of such enhancements. The cells with diamonds indicate the characteristics that have the potential to affect Russia's strategic calculations. As discussed in Chapter Three, Russia has

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[46] See, for instance, Hiski Haukkala and Nicu Popescu, "The Future of EU-Russia Relations," in Hiski Haukkala and Nicu Popescu, eds., *Russian Futures: Horizon 2025*, Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, March 2016.

[47] These proposals were also focused largely on land forces, although that might not be the case, because more NATO air assets in Europe have the potential to enhance the Alliance's ability to defend its members. However, many of the proposals argued that the lack of substantial ground forces deployable to the Baltic States was a particularly acute problem given current NATO posture and capabilities; therefore, the proposals focused on addressing that problem. Assessing whether these proposals suggest the appropriate mix of land and air forces would require an operational analysis that is beyond the scope of this study.

Table 4.5
Proposed NATO Posture Enhancements and the Key Characteristics That Will Likely Affect Russian Reactions

Notable Proposed NATO Posture Enhancements	Effect on Strategic Stability	Effect on Conventional Capability	Location	Extent of Infrastructure Improvements
Station 3–4 NATO armored brigades in the Baltic States		u	u	
Develop and field systems to degrade Russian air defenses	u	u		
Develop and field effective short-range air defense systems		u		
Field native Baltic armor brigades		u	u	
Field native Baltic medium- and long-range air defense systems		u	u	

historically been sensitive to posture enhancements that have the potential to affect strategic or nuclear stability. While NATO may not intend for any of its enhancements to be employed in this manner, Russia may assess that one of the enhancements—developing and fielding capabilities designed to degrade Russian air defense systems—has the potential to do so. Such capabilities could be targeted at systems protecting the Russian homeland from air or cruise missile attacks or at an even wider range of Russian capabilities.[48]

All of the enhancements noted have the potential to affect Russian perceptions of the conventional balance of forces. The proposals outlined in Chapter Two also included several recommendations that would have had a more modest impact (see Table 2.8), but for the sake of brevity, they are not assessed here.[49] But even among the relatively substantial enhancements listed in Table 4.5, some are likely to have a greater effect than others. Stationing three to four armored brigades in the Baltics and fielding systems designed to degrade Russian air defenses are the most notable in this regard. Although not necessarily sufficient on their own to shift the local balance of capabilities in NATO's favor, these enhancements would be quite notable in scale.

Three of these proposed enhancements are intended to be in the Baltic States to address the clear imbalance of forces in Russia's favor in the region. As discussed in Chapter Three, because of the geography and history of the Baltics, they likely represent a more sensitive location for NATO forces than other eastern NATO members, both politically and strategically—though still much less sensitive than some other former Soviet states, such as Ukraine, Belarus,

[48] Russia has expressed similar concerns about the potential for Aegis Ashore missile defense sites to be modified to conduct offensive strikes, in its view potentially violating the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty regime ("US Missile Defense in Eastern Europe: How Russia Will Respond," Sputnik News, May 16, 2016).

[49] In general, the additional proposed enhancements also constituted lesser-included cases for which the broad assessments can be inferred.

and Georgia.[50] None of the posture proposals we highlighted involved dramatic increases in infrastructure, although a certain degree of modest infrastructure improvements were intended to be a component of many of the proposals.[51]

While Table 4.5 outlined the characteristics that are likely to be most important in determining Russian reactions, in reality, the salience of these characteristics will vary depending on the context. For example, in the Russia Lashes Out scenario, which is defined by Russian weakness and instability, there is likely to be the greatest risk of an aggressive Russian response to most U.S. or NATO posture enhancements. By contrast, in the Weakened West scenario, posture enhancements that were of relatively higher risk in other scenarios would likely not have the same effects. The primary danger in this scenario is Western inability or unwillingness to defend eastern NATO members, and under such circumstances, posture enhancements that strengthen NATO capabilities and credibility would likely reduce rather than increase the risk of conflict.

To illustrate how our framework could be applied to a specific posture enhancement across different scenarios, we analyze one of the most prominent of the current proposals in detail. The proposal to station several ABCTs, whether U.S. or NATO, in the Baltic States represents one of the most substantial proposals to address the current sharp imbalance in local capabilities in the Baltics in favor of Russia. This enhancement could have competing effects on whether Russia decides to react aggressively. On the one hand, these units, in combination with other forces, have the potential to substantially slow any Russian attack on the Baltic States, as well as increase the costs of such an attack. If we assume that these are U.S. ABCTs, they also represent a strong and expensive signal that the United States is committed to defending the Baltics. The United States currently has only nine ABCTs in the active component of the Army.[52] Stationing one-third of these units—or even one-quarter if the posture enhancements are implemented using new units—in the Baltics would represent a dramatic signal of U.S. commitment.[53] Both this commitment and the capabilities that these forces represent once in place would likely enhance conventional deterrence and reduce the likelihood of a direct Russian attack on the Baltics.

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[50] The question of how Russian decisionmaking would be affected by developing native Baltic armored and air defense forces rather than stationing similar NATO forces is an interesting one. What makes the comparison particularly difficult is that, even if such native forces were stood up over the next decade, it is unlikely that they would have the same effective capabilities as similar U.S. or Western European units. Building such an effective, new capability from scratch would take time. But if we were to assume that these Baltic units would have the same capabilities as their U.S. counterparts, the Baltic armored units could still have less deterrent value than similar U.S. units. Simply put, the United States could not afford to lose three ABCTs, and the deployment of these scarce assets to the Baltics would be a very strong signal that the United States would be willing to fight rather than surrender the region to Russia. By contrast, native Baltic armored units have no similar tripwire effect. Furthermore, resources spent helping the Baltics develop such units may unintentionally signal a lower willingness on the part of other NATO states to come to the Baltics' aid, and the size of any feasible Baltic armored units would likely be insufficient on their own to complicate Russian attack calculations.

[51] For example, one proposal is to construct barracks and support facilities in one or more of the Baltic States that could accommodate substantially more forces than are currently slated to be stationed there. Another possibility is to dramatically improve rail lines or port facilities to allow for much more-rapid transit of large numbers of heavy forces from Western Europe.

[52] Michelle Tan, "Back-to-Back Rotations to Europe Could Stress the Army's Armored BCTs," *Army Times*, February 11, 2016.

[53] This may even understate the degree of this commitment, because the ABCTs in the Baltics would presumably need to be kept at high levels of readiness at all times.

On the other hand, the introduction of these units into the Baltics, presumably on a permanent basis, would also likely be perceived by Russia as a threatening act. Although three or four ABCTs are not enough to launch a plausible invasion of the Russian heartland, they could be sufficient to go after smaller pieces of Russian territory. For example, while the Baltic States represent a piece of NATO territory that is exposed and difficult to defend, the Kaliningrad enclave represents a similarly exposed territory of Russia. Russian decisionmakers would also likely interpret this move in the context of an overall high perception of U.S. and NATO hostile intent toward Russia, based on numerous events over the past 20 years (discussed in Chapter Three). Given the range of other U.S. security challenges throughout the world, Russia may simply not believe U.S. assurances that these units are intended to remain in the Baltic States indefinitely for purely defensive purposes.

The concern for the United States in such a scenario would be twofold. First, if Russia perceives the deployment of these ABCTs to reflect either potentially offensive intent by NATO or a direct political challenge to the Russian leadership, Russia may decide to act precipitously to prevent the deployment from being carried out. Second, although these units would likely decrease the likelihood of a direct Russian attack on the Baltics once they are in place, the fact that Russia may view them as threatening gives it an incentive to undertake other actions to strengthen its security that may be counter to U.S. and NATO interests. This could include a substantial buildup of Russian forces in Kaliningrad and elsewhere on the Russia-NATO border or efforts to find other points of leverage, such as cyber vulnerabilities, that could be employed in the event of a crisis.

How these two competing effects ultimately affect Russian decisionmaking will depend on the scenario in which the ABCTs are introduced. In both the baseline and Russia Lashes Out scenarios, Russian feelings of weakness are more acute, so such substantial U.S. or NATO posture enhancements would likely be seen as threatening. In the Weakened West scenario, however, Russia is feeling relatively more confident. In that scenario, NATO would represent an overall lower threat to Russia, so maintaining several ABCTs in the Baltics would likely on net reinforce deterrence.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

This report has developed a framework for assessing possible Russian reactions to U.S. and NATO posture enhancements in Europe. Our analysis highlights the need to consider 11 key factors when assessing Russian reactions, incorporating the strategic context, the Russian domestic context, and the characteristics of the proposed posture enhancements. We also conducted several case studies (see Appendix A) to illustrate how these key factors can help us understand Russian decisionmaking at key moments in the NATO-Russia relationship over the past 20 years. A more comprehensive look at such moments is included in Appendix B. We then illustrated how this framework could be applied in practice by assessing potential Russian reactions both to ongoing and planned NATO posture enhancements and to additional proposed enhancements that could be implemented under varying conditions over the following decade.

This framework enables analysts to consider a wide range of factors that are likely to influence Russian decisionmaking. Western analysts, depending on where they sit, may be habituated to conducting military analyses separately from political analyses. When assessing likely Russian behavior, such a division is problematic. Russian policymakers, more concerned about their ability to continue to hold power domestically than their Western counterparts are, often consider political threats and signals to be just as salient as military ones. They may also respond in military terms to what Western analysts would view as purely political developments, and vice versa. To properly anticipate Russian reactions, Western analysts will need to tightly integrate their military and political analyses. Our report aims to contribute to their ability to do so.

Key Observations Regarding Russian Decisionmaking

Although the primary aim of this report was to build this analytical framework, several key points emerged from our illustrative application of the framework to ongoing or proposed U.S. and NATO posture enhancements. These key observations include the following:

- *Russian perceptions of U.S. and NATO capability and resolve*. Although Russian rhetoric sometimes characterizes the West as weak or irresolute, Russian leaders' current behavior suggests that they see a strong commitment from NATO, and particularly the United States, to defend its allies. Combine that with NATO's clear overall edge in conventional capabilities, and it is likely that Russia currently assesses that direct aggression against a NATO member would likely result in a very damaging, and potentially disastrous, military conflict.

- *Hardening Russian threat perceptions of NATO*. Russian elites appear to have increasingly concluded that the United States and NATO represent long-term political and potentially military threats to the current regime in Moscow. Although the United States and NATO can be militarily deterred for the time being, many Russian policymakers appear to believe that the prospects for a stable, long-term accommodation with NATO are limited. This perception, if not reversed, represents an unstable feature of the European security order that increases the risk of conflict, inadvertent or otherwise.
- *Limited Russian strategic interest in the Baltics*. Our review of Russian documents and recent Russian strategic literature found very little discussion of the Baltic States as an important strategic area. To be sure, Russia has taken and is continuing to take limited aggressive actions toward the Baltic States through political, media, intelligence, and cyber efforts. But we could identify no serious discussion of the strategic value of retaking part or all of the Baltic States, either for their intrinsic value or as a way of weakening NATO. This lack of discussion of the Baltics was in sharp contrast to some other former Soviet states, such as Ukraine and Georgia, which represent a much greater focus. Any Russian decision to confront NATO militarily over the Baltics would not appear to come from any existing vein of Russian strategic thinking.
- *Cost sensitivity of current Russian leadership*. Although Russian actions since 2014, and arguably since 2008, have shown an increasing willingness to take calculated risks to achieve strategic goals, these actions have all had very limited military costs. Russian campaigns in Ukraine and Syria exceeded in scope what most analysts would previously have considered likely, but they have remained militarily limited affairs and have targeted adversaries with capabilities clearly inferior to Russia's. Indeed, Russian assistance to rebels in eastern Ukraine appears to have been gradually calibrated to give enough assistance to stave off defeat, but little more. Where Russia has been willing to accept large costs is in the economic realm, where Western sanctions have limited Moscow's ability to cope with and respond to the decline in the price of hydrocarbons, harming the Russian economy. Militarily, however, Russia has yet to risk substantial resources in any of its aggressive actions.
- *Threats to Russian regime stability*. While the evidence suggests that the regime in Moscow is currently stable, there are important long-term trends that may eventually threaten the regime's hold on power. These include, most notably, the country's poor economic performance, the lack of clarity regarding a post-Putin leadership, and the potential for more aggressive nationalists to become a more powerful political force. Declining regime stability has the potential to lead to a more unpredictable Russian foreign policy, resulting from either changes in regime composition or heightened pressures to gain domestic legitimacy through more-aggressive policies.

Policy Implications

Our analysis also highlighted the following implications for U.S. and NATO policymakers:

- *Proposals to enhance deterrence must consider the wider context in which they will be implemented*. The main theme of this report is that Russian reactions to U.S. and NATO posture enhancements may vary considerably depending on the context in which they take

place. Policymakers should consider whether the advisability of certain enhancements is dependent on specific conditions that may be subject to change or could help to achieve U.S. goals in a wider range of possible futures. Enhancements whose benefits are highly context-dependent should be pursued with greater caution. The key strategic and Russian domestic political factors identified in this report provide a list of potential signposts that analysts can monitor to aid posture enhancement decisions.

- *Enhancement projects should avoid autopilot.* Many posture enhancements require years of lead time to execute properly, so the precise context in which they come to fruition may differ substantially from the context in which they began. There is therefore a danger that projects are completed on "autopilot," which can inadvertently signal aggressive intent under changed circumstances. For example, in May 2016, NATO announced that the missile defense site in Romania had been completed and that ground would soon be broken on a similar site in Poland. At the same time, NATO was floating a separate set of posture enhancement proposals connected with the upcoming Warsaw Summit. The timing helped to undercut U.S. assurances that Russia was not the target of the missile defense systems. Policymakers should consider delaying final completion or announcements of posture enhancements that may take place during times of heightened tension and should routinely reassess posture decisions in the process of being implemented.
- *Systems that could affect strategic stability deserve special scrutiny.* Russia has long maintained that such systems as BMD have the potential to affect strategic stability — and are therefore highly threatening. Although Western analysts often point out that these systems lack the technical capabilities to affect a nuclear arsenal as large as Russia's, Russia's concerns appear to be sincerely held. This may be due to fears about the long-term development and scalability of these systems, or it could be due to different perceptions of the current reliability of Russia's second-strike nuclear deterrent or the security of its command and control systems. Given the centrality of Russia's nuclear deterrent to its security, Russia may be willing to run substantial risks to forestall further development of systems that may affect strategic stability. The disconnect between the two sides over the implications of NATO development of these systems thus has the potential to lead to conflict.

Posture and capability enhancements are important tools that the United States and NATO can use to minimize the risk of Russian aggression against NATO members. However, policymakers will need to pay careful attention to the manner in which the enhancements are executed and the context in which they are undertaken in order to maximize their effectiveness and minimize the risk of unwanted Russian reactions.

APPENDIX A

Russian Decisionmaking in Key Cases

Relations between Russia and NATO have undergone numerous prominent crises and potential crises over the past 20 years. By surveying Russian decisionmaking in four of these cases, we can illustrate how the key factors identified in Chapter Three affected Russian responses.

We selected three cases—the 1999 Kosovo War, the 2008 Georgia War, and the 2014 Ukraine crisis—as the most important and influential events in the NATO-Russia relationship since the end of the Cold War.[1] The fourth case, the 2002–2004 accession of the Baltic States to NATO, did not get as much attention at the time and, notably, did not generate a crisis in relations with Russia. However, precisely because of this lack of an aggressive Russian reaction, as well as the centrality of the Baltics for U.S. and NATO posture enhancement questions in the present, we felt this case was highly salient to examine. We do not use the cases to test specific hypotheses; rather, the case studies are included as illustrative sketches of how the key factors identified in this report have affected Russian decisionmaking in the past.

1999 Kosovo War

On March 24, 1999, NATO launched air strikes against targets in Serbia to compel Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic to accept a negotiated settlement to resolve the long-simmering ethnic conflict in Serbia's province of Kosovo. The air campaign would last 78 days, provoking what was, at the time, the greatest crisis in relations between Russia and the United States in the post-Soviet era. In the eyes of at least some Russians, the war demonstrated that NATO could no longer be considered a partner but was instead "an expansionist alliance with offensive armed forces and operational plans."[2]

Contending Perspectives

From the time Yugoslavia began to fragment in 1991, Kosovo was identified as a likely flashpoint for interethnic violence. Although the province was of tremendous cultural importance to Serbia, its population was approximately 90 percent ethnic Albanian. The Kosovar Albanians had pursued a nonviolent campaign of self-determination throughout the 1990s, but these tensions became increasingly militarized, ultimately escalating into widespread violence in 1998.

[1] Ideally, we would assess prior cases in which NATO made posture enhancements on its eastern flank to better understand how the key factors may shape Russian responses to such enhancements. However, NATO members have not undertaken any analogous posture enhancements in the post–Cold War period.

[2] Alexei Arbatov, then–deputy chair of the Defense Committee in Russia's State Duma, quoted in Vladimir Baranovsky, "The Kosovo Factor in Russia's Foreign Policy," *International Spectator*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2000, p. 116.

Over the course of the following year, diplomats from the United States, Europe, and Russia sought to defuse the crisis. However, Western and Russian decisionmakers had sharply diverging views about how to do so. From the perspective of many in Washington and in European capitals, Kosovo was a humanitarian concern and, indirectly, a strategic one. Were the violence in Kosovo to escalate, it threatened to undermine the tentative peace that had been achieved in nearby Bosnia and maintained through the deployment of tens of thousands of predominantly NATO troops. It also had the potential to spread to neighboring Macedonia, which had thus far been spared the violence that had engulfed much of the rest of the former Yugoslavia. Western decisionmakers thus saw in Kosovo a threat to the NATO peacekeepers in Bosnia, who might be plunged back into the middle of a civil war, and the risk of a new refugee crisis only four short years after the ones in Bosnia and Croatia had ended.

Russian perspectives were more complicated. Although Russians tended to feel some degree of sympathy for Serbs as fellow Orthodox Slavs, this sympathy should not be overstated.[3] In fact, Serbia and Kosovo held little intrinsic value for President Yeltsin or those in his inner circle. The way in which the Kosovo crisis was resolved, however, was of great interest to them. On the one hand, at this time, Russia was heavily dependent on financial support from the West and Western-dominated institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, and Yeltsin did not want to imperil this financial lifeline by antagonizing Western powers on a critical issue.[4] On the other hand, many in Russia felt that NATO threats of force against Serbia posed serious dangers for Russia, both indirectly and directly. Indirectly, NATO threatened Russian standing among the other countries of the former Soviet Union, where Russia tried to exercise a clear sphere of influence. Directly, NATO's actions suggested that NATO might ultimately seek to determine the outcome of conflicts in Russia as well (such as the one in Chechnya).[5] For instance, Duma representative Arbatov claimed, "the slogan 'Serbia today, Russia tomorrow' has now become the main one for Russia."[6]

Russia was paralyzed by these competing concerns. The end result, as many in the United States saw it, was that Russia failed to play any constructive role in resolving the Kosovo crisis. Russian diplomats opposed the various peace-brokering efforts of the West but failed to offer a viable alternative.[7] With all efforts at peacemaking at an apparent impasse, beginning in March 1999, NATO launched air strikes against Serbia in an effort to force it to accept a negotiated settlement to the conflict in Kosovo.

The NATO air campaign precipitated an intense crisis in relations between Russia and the West, with Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov calling the air strikes an act of "genocide"

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[3] Ekaterina A. Stepanova, "Explaining Russia's Dissent on Kosovo," Carnegie Moscow Center, PONARS Policy Memo No. 57, March 1999.

[4] Ekaterina A. Stepanova, "Russia's Policy on the Kosovo Crisis: The Limits of Cooperative Peacemaking," in Kurt R. Spillmann, Joachim Krause, and Claude Nicolet, eds., *Kosovo: Lessons Learned for International Cooperative Security*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2000, p. 215.

[5] Baranovsky, 2000; Stepanova, 1999.

[6] David Mendeloff, "'Pernicious History' as a Cause of National Misperceptions: Russia and the 1999 Kosovo War," *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2008, p. 47.

[7] Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000, pp. 12–13; and John Norris, *Collision Course: NATO, Russia, and Kosovo*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2005, p. 15.

and demanding that NATO leaders be tried for war crimes.[8] But the air strikes also touched off a major crisis within Russia. Russian public opinion strongly opposed NATO's campaign. Opposition among Russian foreign and defense policy elites was also intense, particularly within the Russian military.[9] Liberals and "Westernizers" were widely seen as discredited by NATO's actions, and many leading figures within the foreign policy establishment feared to take action to resolve the crisis for fears of the political repercussions.[10]

These tensions within Russia came to a head just as the crisis seemed to be coming to an end. Serbia accepted a peace deal that granted NATO authority to establish a peace operation throughout the territory of Kosovo. But before NATO forces entered, nearly 200 Russian troops that had been participating in the peacekeeping mission in Bosnia entered Kosovo and seized the province's primary airfield, while Russian military authorities sought to send another six aircraft filled with paratroopers to reinforce them in an apparent effort to replace the Western-negotiated peace deal with de facto partition of the province. Meanwhile, Russian diplomats strongly denied that any such troop movements were occurring. The crisis was ultimately resolved through a series of chaotic meetings between diplomats at the highest levels, but a direct military confrontation between U.S. and Russian military forces was only narrowly averted.[11]

Consequences

The Kosovo War had several implications for Russia's relations with the West and for Russian domestic politics, in both the short and long terms.

In the short term, Russia chose to "freeze" relations with NATO—a compromise between the liberal elites who were more Western-oriented and those who were more hawkish, particularly in the security services.[12] Russia also sought to reinvest in military capabilities to counter NATO. For instance, Russia worked to develop an integrated air defense system with Belarus. It sought to increase military readiness (neglected in the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union), hoping to offset the costs, in part, through increased arms sales abroad. Defense policy and military doctrine placed a higher priority on Russia's nuclear deterrent, and Russia ceased cooperation with the West on arms control and disarmament measures.[13]

At the domestic level, too, there were repercussions from the crisis. Western-oriented and liberal elites in Russia were weakened by NATO's actions. All of the major Russian political parties condemned the NATO air campaign, and many leading liberals were afraid to take any actions seen as accommodating NATO for fear of being punished politically.[14]

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[8] Norris, 2005, pp. 14, 16.

[9] William Zimmerman, *The Russian People and Foreign Policy: Russian Elite and Mass Perspectives, 1993–2000*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. 202–205.

[10] Baranovsky, 2000; Norris, 2005; Stepanova, 1999.

[11] For a detailed account of the crisis, see Norris, 2005, Chapters 9 and 10.

[12] Baranovsky, 2000, p. 120.

[13] Alexei Arbatov, *The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine: Lessons Learned from Kosovo and Chechnya*, Garmisch-Parternkirchen: George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, Marshall Center Papers No. 2, 2000; and Stepanova, 2000, pp. 216–219.

[14] Baranovsky, 2000; Norris, 2005, Chapters 9 and 10; Stepanova, 2000, pp. 219–222.

The longer-term consequences of the Kosovo crisis are harder to pinpoint and are heavily disputed. Many observers have noted that Russia used NATO's actions in Kosovo to justify Russian military actions in Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014 and have ascribed much of the blame for these later crises to the West's use of force against Serbia.[15] Others are skeptical that Kosovo had long-lasting effects on Russia. Cooperation between Russia and NATO members had largely returned to normal within a year of the end of the Kosovo crisis. Russian popular perceptions of the United States quickly bounced back from their post-crisis lows (when approximately one-third of Russians viewed the United States positively) to roughly their levels before the bombing campaign (when around 70 percent of Russians had positive opinions of the United States).[16] In the wake of the September 11 attacks, the United States and Russia found many areas of common ground and opportunities for cooperation. In the estimation of two American observers, the NATO bombing campaign "was clearly bad for the West's relations with . . . Russia, but it was hardly a turning point."[17]

At the domestic level, too, the longer-term consequences of the Kosovo War are difficult to estimate. While it is true that anti-Western sentiment skyrocketed in Russia during the war, liberals, reformers, and pro-Western policy elites had already been largely discredited by the economic and political chaos of the previous eight years. Except during the period of daily news footage of NATO bombs falling on Serbian targets, the Russian public paid scant attention to foreign policy issues, focusing instead on issues much closer to home, such as the country's economic distress and violence related to Chechnya.[18] Among foreign and defense policy elites, there can be little doubt that the Kosovo War increased skepticism of and antipathy toward the United States and NATO. Even here, however, the precise consequences of the crisis are disputed. Some Western observers believed that NATO sent an important message to Russian elites — "that it would not be intimidated by their protests over a matter that did not concern them directly" — and that failure to act strongly in this matter might have emboldened the hardest-line elements of the Russian policy elite.[19]

Explanations for Russian Behavior

Russia's choices throughout the crisis can be understood through three lenses — strategic calculations, domestic politics, and historical context.

Many Russians forcefully argued that NATO's air campaign against Serbia both revealed Western intentions and provided a signal to third parties about the relative balance of power in Europe. From a Russian perspective, the signal that the air campaign was intended to send to Russian allies was clear: Russia cannot protect you, so you are better off befriending the West. Similarly, NATO's actions betrayed its limitless objectives: It would seek to determine how all other countries governed themselves. Because Russia had its own restive regions, many wor-

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15 See, for instance, Paul J. Saunders, "The United States Shares the Blame for the Russia-Georgia Crisis," *U.S. News and World Report*, August 12, 2008; and Masha Gessen, "Crimea Is Putin's Revenge," *Slate*, March 21, 2014.

16 Samuel A. Greene, "Future Approaches to the U.S.," in Hiski Haukkala and Nicu Popescu, eds., *Russian Futures: Horizon 2025*, Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, March 2016, p. 44.

17 Daalder and O'Hanlon, 2000, p. 13.

18 Zimmerman, 2002, Chapters 5 and 6.

19 Daalder and O'Hanlon, 2000, p. 13.

ried that it might become a target of Western "humanitarian intervention."[20] Many Westerners considered such concerns to be paranoia. It was one thing to bomb a small, militarily weak country over human rights issues and refugee flows but quite another to attack Russia, with its vast nuclear arsenal. Throughout the 1990s, however, concerns of a Russian breakup similar to that of the Soviet Union were common. In such circumstances of acute vulnerability, even such far-fetched arguments as "Serbia today, Russia tomorrow" were able to gain currency.

In many cases, policy elites seek to manipulate popular fears of or anger toward foreign countries to enhance their own standing with the public, even if they do not believe their own rhetoric. During the Kosovo crisis, some Russian elites cynically exploited resentment over NATO's actions to advance their own political agendas at the expense of the Yeltsin regime. But such theories explain little of the Russian government's reactions to the war in Kosovo. Russia at the time was highly dependent on Western financial assistance. Yeltsin and those in his inner circle were desperately trying to placate public opinion and hardline elites while still maintaining sufficiently cooperative relations with the West to retain access to the International Monetary Fund and other assistance. Rather than fanning the flames of anti-Western sentiment, many policymakers were trying to tamp down demands for a more aggressively anti-Western policy. Moreover, many of the most hardline leaders were in the Russian military and did not make public statements at all. Clearly, the fear and anger apparent among a wide range of elites were not simply a public political ploy to enhance their own standing; they were sincere responses to NATO actions that many Russians regarded as both threatening and immoral.

A third explanation derives from the habits of thinking that Russians acquired over many years as one of the world's great empires and then as one of two superpowers. For much of the foreign and defense policy elite, the collapse of the Soviet Union was a national catastrophe. They were acutely aware of Russia's diminished international prestige and chafed at having terms dictated to them by Western powers. At one level, there was a logical contradiction in Russia's demands that it maintain the large role it had played since 1992 in peacekeeping forces in Georgia's two breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia while insisting that Europe and the United States respect Serbia's territorial integrity. Yet in the minds of many Russians, there was no contradiction: Russia was a great power that deserved to be able to dictate the terms of stability in the countries of the former Soviet Union and be allowed to exercise a veto over NATO military operations further afield. Much of the anger felt by Russian decisionmakers was expressed in terms of Russia being denied its "rightful" role as one of the world's great powers. In this respect, Russia was similar to France and the United Kingdom in their periods of postimperial retrenchment, when elites struggled to reconcile their diminished capabilities and expansive international ambitions. Just as French and British decisionmakers were willing to pay large costs to maintain their prestige on the international stage after the loss of their empires, including multiple military interventions in and economic subsidies to former colonies, many Russian elites appeared willing to pay a high economic price to counter NATO actions.[21]

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[20] Baranovsky, 2000, pp. 115–166; Stepanova, 1999, pp. 2–3.

[21] On the parallels with the British and French experiences, see Miles Kahler, "Empires, Neo-Empires, and Political Change: The British and French Experiences," in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, eds., *The End of Empire? The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective*, Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1997.

Conclusion

Russian behavior in the Kosovo crisis appears to have been motivated by a complex mix of factors. Many in Russia, particularly among the hardliners and those in the military, truly felt threatened by NATO's actions. The capabilities NATO demonstrated in the Kosovo campaign, and the willingness to employ them over Russia's objections, raised the possibility in the minds of many elites that Russia could someday be in Serbia's place. The discrediting of liberals by years of political and economic chaos in Russia had already strengthened hardline voices by 1999, making a more cooperative response unlikely.[22] The damage to Russian prestige that the crisis represented or revealed gave Russian policymakers strong incentives to respond aggressively to the NATO campaign, even at the risk of endangering further Western economic support.

The Kosovo War was almost certainly not in itself a turning point in relations between Russia and the West. It did, however, contribute to solidifying anti-Western views among many in the Russian security services and added to the reservoir of resentments on which future Russian leaders could draw to legitimize hardline actions. The war also highlighted that Russia's acute domestic vulnerabilities amplified the threats Russians perceived from the West, and it revealed that hardliners in Russia were willing to pay a high price (including the potential loss of Western financial assistance and the costs of increased military capabilities and readiness) to counter what they perceived as Western aggression.

2002–2004 Accession of the Baltic States to NATO

On March 29, 2004, three former Soviet republics—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—joined NATO. While many members of the Russian policy and military elite greeted this development with suspicion, official responses were muted, primarily focused on minimizing the impact of this expansion on Russian security by resorting to diplomacy. The Kremlin made certain concessions to NATO to showcase a willingness to cooperate but simultaneously employed aggressive negotiating tactics with the aim of limiting the types of forces that could be based in the Baltic States after NATO accession. The failure of this gambit helped contribute to the subsequent decline in relations and trust between Russia and NATO, and to the more tumultuous crises to come in Georgia and Ukraine.

Russia's Troubled Relationship with the Baltic Republics

Post-Soviet Russia's relationship with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania differed from those with other countries in its near abroad for both historical and political reasons. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the Baltic States had historically been less integrated with the rest of the Russian Empire, and their populations had often faced discriminatory policies. By the time the Russian Empire collapsed in 1917, its government had thoroughly alienated much of the populations, and the three republics swiftly asserted their independence. In 1940, the Soviet Union forcibly annexed the three countries and engaged in a brutal program of Sovietization, which was interrupted by the Nazi invasion in June 1941. After three years of German occupation, the Red Army recaptured the Baltic territories and restarted their integration into the Soviet Union.

[22] Stent, 2015, p. 42.

Bolshevik efforts to convert Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians into model Soviet citizens showed relatively little success, even though these three republics enjoyed the highest standard of living in the Soviet Union. Soviet economic planners based new technologically advanced industries in the area, and large numbers of immigrants moved to Estonia and Latvia from the other Soviet republics. While official use of Russian impelled many Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians to learn the Soviet Union's *lingua franca*, few of them developed fraternal feelings for their larger neighbor. Anti-Soviet sentiments extended even into the top levels of the republic-level Communist parties in the three states.[23] With the loosening of political restrictions under *glasnost* in the 1980s, the Baltic republics began asserting their independence even while remaining under Communist control, and in 1991, they were the first of the Soviet republics to declare independence.

This historical legacy strongly shaped the relationship between the Baltic States and the Russian Federation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As a matter of policy, these three republics declared that they had been under illegal occupation between 1940 and 1991, delegitimizing everything the Soviet Union had done within their borders. Latvia and Estonia, which harbored large minority populations of ethnic Russians, adopted laws demanding that individuals who were not citizens at the time of the 1940 Soviet occupation or their descendants would have to pass language exams to gain citizenship. This approach rendered large numbers of ethnic Russians in the two countries stateless and angered Moscow, but it was argued to be a necessary corrective for the Soviet period when the languages and identities of the majority populations were discriminated against. Furthermore, while most of the former Soviet republics were willing to maintain close economic and sometimes military ties with Moscow, the Baltic States immediately sought a closer relationship with Europe. The only three of the 15 former constituents of the Soviet Union to eschew involvement with the post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania began seeking membership in both the EU and NATO in the mid-1990s. The three governments also sought the withdrawal of all Russian military forces from the numerous bases on their territories as quickly as possible.

As a consequence of the Baltic republics' decisive steps to distance themselves from their larger neighbor, Russian leaders found themselves with few means of influencing behavior of these states. The historical legacy of distrust meant that there was no reason to expect that the Baltic governments would ever be friendly to Russian interests. Russian policymakers made clear their intense frustration with the prospect of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania joining NATO, but they lacked economic or political influence that might forestall these states from seeking membership. Instead, their only hope lay in either convincing the West to reject the Baltics' overtures or, barring that, attaching conditions to their membership that minimized the perceived threat to Russian strategic interests.

In the late 1990s, the Russian government attempted to prevent the expansion of NATO into the Baltics by signaling that this step would cause a serious breach in Russia's relationship with NATO. In 1998, President Yeltsin stated that the prospect of Estonia, Latvia, and

[23] For instance, Anatolijs Gorbunovs, the chairman of the Latvian Communist Party Central Committee, openly supported the pro-autonomy Popular Front in 1988. Similarly, Chairman of the Presidium of the Estonian Supreme Soviet Arnold Rüütel helped orchestrate the Estonian Supreme Soviet's issuance of a declaration of sovereignty in 1988 and later served as president of independent Estonia.

Lithuania joining the Alliance constituted a "redline" that the West must not cross.[24] Tallinn, Vilnius, and Riga showed no interest in Yeltsin's proffered alternative of security guarantees if they stayed out of NATO.[25] The Russian government claimed that the disenfranchisement of the Russian population in Estonia and Latvia proved that these countries remained unworthy of NATO and EU membership. The Kremlin also attempted to employ its minor unresolved border disputes with the Baltic republics as a tool to keep them out of the Alliance.[26] These gambits failed to have the desired effect, however, and NATO continued the process of incorporating the three Baltic republics, inviting them to begin accession talks at the Prague Summit in November 2002.

Putin's Baltic Strategy

After Putin became president of Russia in December 1999, his government pursued a subtler diplomatic strategy seeking to limit further NATO enlargement or, barring that, limit its potential strategic impact. This strategy comprised a program to enhance cooperation with NATO with an effort to secure international agreements limiting the ability of an expanded NATO to locate strategic forces near Russia's borders. In contrast to Yeltsin's harsher rhetoric on the topic, Putin and his advisers sought to impress Western governments, most importantly the United States, with the possible contributions that Russia could make to bolster Western security, particularly in the fight against terrorism after 2001. Linking its own conflict in Chechnya with NATO's counterterrorism efforts helped legitimize Russia's unpopular war there both at home and abroad—and, it was hoped, provided a positive incentive for the West to respect Moscow's wishes on European issues, such as NATO enlargement and missile defense.[27] Furthermore, Russian officials hoped that a larger, more diluted NATO might lose its military character and evolve into a political organization posing less of a threat to Russia.[28] An important component of Putin's policy of selective engagement with the Western alliance was the formation in 2002 of the NATO-Russia Council, which granted Russia a voice in NATO affairs. A Russian ambassador to NATO would help to coordinate policy, particularly in counterterrorism activities. In addition to dangling the "carrot" of security cooperation, the Kremlin strategy wielded a "stick"—the threat of suspending or withdrawing from existing arms control agreements or refusing to ratify new ones.[29]

Russia connected the prospect of NATO enlargement to the amended CFE Treaty. The original treaty had been concluded in 1990 between NATO and the Warsaw Pact and limited the amount, types, and locations of conventional military forces that could be deployed

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[24] Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*, New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009, p. 170.

[25] Leonid A. Karabeshkin and Dina R. Spechler, "EU and NATO Enlargement: Russia's Expectations, Responses and Options for the Future," *European Security*, Vol. 16, No. 3–4, 2007, p. 319.

[26] Ingmar Oldberg, *Membership or Partnership? The Relations of Russia and Its Neighbors with NATO and the EU in the Enlargement Context*, Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), FOI-R-1364-SE, 2004, p. 19.

[27] For an account of Russia's "ambivalent" relationship with NATO in this period, see Stephen J. Blank, *The NATO-Russia Partnership: A Marriage of Convenience or a Troubled Relationship?* Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2006.

[28] Mankoff, 2009, pp. 168–170.

[29] Zdzislaw Lachowski, *The Adapted CFE Treaty and the Admission of the Baltic States to NATO*, Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2002, p. 33.

on the continent.[30] The dissolution of both the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union rendered the treaty's provisions outdated, particularly in light of NATO enlargement. In November 1999, the parties of the CFE signed the Agreement on Adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (or the "Adapted CFE") at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Summit in Istanbul. Essentially a new treaty, the agreement replaced the original CFE's bloc-based provisions with a scheme based on national and territorial divisions and loosened the restrictions on how Russia could deploy forces, including in the volatile North Caucasus.[31]

Contrary to the expectations of some observers who anticipated that Russia would try to use the CFE as a mechanism to block Baltic membership in the NATO alliance, Russia attempted to force the Baltics to join the Adapted CFE—albeit on Moscow's terms.[32] Certain members of the Russian defense community were already skeptical of the CFE Treaty before 2004, but those who believed that it could help undergird Russian national interests overruled them.[33] In the Russians' view, the Baltics represented an unacceptable gap in the CFE Treaty regime in which NATO could potentially deploy unlimited amounts of treaty-limited military equipment.[34]

While Russian policymakers were cautiously optimistic that the Adapted CFE would be a net benefit to their nation's security, the attempt to use the treaty as leverage over NATO accession failed. The NATO signatories refused to ratify the treaty before Moscow made good on promises to withdraw its forces deployed to Georgia and Moldova (specifically, Transnistria) as part of the frozen conflicts in those states.[35] The imminent prospect of NATO expansion in Eastern Europe, and particularly the Baltics, further complicated the issue of the Adapted CFE. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were not parties to either the original CFE or the adapted treaty—meaning that unlike existing NATO members, they were not subject to any treaty restrictions on the conventional forces that could be placed in their territories—and Moscow insisted that they needed to ratify the Adapted CFE prior to joining NATO. However, the three republics and their Western partners promised that the Baltics would apply for CFE membership after the treaty went into effect.[36] The Russian Duma initially refused to ratify the Adapted CFE unless NATO members did so as well. After the Baltic States joined NATO, the

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[30] Andrei Areshev, "DOVSE. Ustarevshii dogovor i novye realii [CFE. An Outdated Agreement and the New Realities]," *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, No. 12, 2007.

[31] Wilcox, 2011, pp. 570–571.

[32] Klaus Bolving, *Baltic CFE Membership*, Copenhagen: Danish Institute of International Affairs, 2001, p. 112.

[33] Oldberg, 2004, p. 20.

[34] Stephen Larrabee argued in 2003 that "Russia may try to use CFE to constrain the ability of NATO—and especially the U.S.—to carry out an Article 5 commitment to the Baltic states by limiting NATO's ability to temporarily station forces on the territory of the Baltic states" (F. Stephen Larrabee, "The Baltic States and NATO Membership: Testimony Presented to the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on April 3, 2003," Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, CT-204, 2003, p. 7).

[35] Russian officials insisted that this issue was distinct from the CFE, while NATO countries were violating the treaty's provisions by relocating U.S. personnel and equipment from bases in Germany to former Warsaw Pact countries. A Russian diplomat wrote in 2007 that Westerners' "peculiar logic" of asserting that a few hundred Russian troops in Transnistria posed an insuperable barrier to the ratification of the Adapted CFE, while thousands of well-armed U.S. troops in Bulgaria did not, proved that NATO had always acted in bad faith (Areshev, 2007).

[36] Wade Boese, "NATO Expands, Russia Grumbles," *Arms Control Today*, May 1, 2004a.

Russian government reversed its position and ratified the Adapted CFE in July 2004.[37] This step failed to make the desired impression on NATO, and in December 2005, NATO reissued its demand that Russia complete the withdrawal of forces from Georgia and Transnistria before NATO would ratify the treaty.[38]

Stymied in its initial attempts to compel the new Baltic NATO members to join the Adapted CFE Treaty, Putin's government adopted a more vigorous diplomatic strategy that held the CFE hostage. In February 2007, Putin announced that the CFE was "in a state of crisis," and in April, he suggested that Russia would suspend its compliance with the treaty's provisions until all NATO members ratified it. In June, Russia called an emergency conference of all CFE states and issued a series of demands, the most important of which was that the Baltic republics join the treaty. Moscow also aimed to secure the elimination of the flank restrictions on the deployment of forces within its territory and a reduction of the amount of equipment allowed to NATO states; it also pressed that the treaty enter force no later than July 2008. These proposals received no traction from NATO members, an outcome that Russian diplomats attributed to the intransigence of their U.S. counterparts. In December 2007, Putin made good on his threats and suspended Russian compliance with the CFE (a step not allowed under the provisions of the treaty). Over the next several years, Moscow continued to propose reviving the CFE, or new similar treaties, on terms similar to those it laid out in 2007, until eventually, in March 2015, Russia announced its complete withdrawal from the treaty.[39]

While Moscow continues to hope for an international legal framework over conventional forces in Europe, its failure to forestall NATO enlargement into the Baltics by diplomatic means undermined the faith of Russia's policy elite in their ability to secure meaningful security concessions from the West by negotiation alone.[40] They considered Russia's willingness to cooperate with NATO and acquiesce to NATO expansion as a major and sometimes humiliating concession and believed the West had repaid it with an utter refusal to compromise on issues that the Kremlin considered paramount for Russian security. This experience appears to have contributed to the greater willingness of Putin and his advisers to resort to more-aggressive measures to confront identified threats to Russian security and constrain the continued growth of NATO into Russia's near abroad.

Explanations for Russian Behavior

Russia's comparatively muted response to NATO enlargement in the Baltics resulted from the confluence of the country's strategic context and domestic politics in the mid-2000s, in which senior Russian policymakers and Vladimir Putin believed that they might be able to influence possible NATO posture enhancements and preempt the threats they could create for Russian security.

Russian decisionmakers would surely have preferred to prevent NATO enlargement altogether, but they lacked an effective means of doing so. While many members of the Russian policy elite expressed suspicion about the motives underlying NATO enlargement, optimists—

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[37] Wade Boese, "Dispute over Russian Withdrawal from Georgia, Moldova Stall CFE Treaty," *Arms Control Today*, Vol. 34, No. 7, September 2004b, p. 43.

[38] Areshev, 2007.

[39] Iurii Belobrov, "Krizis DOVSE zatianulsia. Pora iskat' vykhod [The CFE Crisis Has Dragged On. It Is Time to Search for an Exit]," *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, No. 8, 2009.

[40] For discussion on Russia's 2009–2010 proposals for a new European security framework, see Chapter Three.

including, at the time, Putin—hoped that a larger NATO might not be a stronger NATO. Even though its overall capabilities greatly outstripped those of Russia, in the absence of significant enhancements in NATO's relative local capabilities, the obligation to defend a region sandwiched between Kaliningrad and Saint Petersburg could weaken the Alliance rather than strengthen it. Russian observers expressed alarm at the prospect of the Baltic States hosting major NATO military installations so close to their borders, but this was not an inevitable consequence of these republics' joining the Alliance. NATO involvement in the war in Afghanistan suggested that posturing forces to defend the new members against possible Russian aggression might be a low priority. NATO enlargement might even prove to be only a symbolic gesture that would not erode Russia's strategic position.

Favorable domestic conditions for Putin enabled him to pursue his strategy of selective cooperation with NATO despite the skepticism of Russian policy elites. Putin enjoyed widespread popularity due to improving economic conditions, and internal threats to his regime's legitimacy were minimal. The color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine occurred late in this period and were not initially appreciated as the threat to Russian domestic stability that they were a few years later. Furthermore, Putin and his domestic allies increasingly consolidated their domination of the country's media in the early 2000s, muting public criticism of his policies. Opinion polling suggested that ordinary Russians were not particularly invested in the issue of the Baltics becoming NATO members, but essentially no Russian policy elites openly advocated a softer line toward NATO enlargement than that taken by Putin.[41] Even Russia's marginalized liberal parties advocated an approach similar to Putin's, and Russian critics of the President's policies accused him of being too conciliatory.

Putin's scheme to render NATO enlargement acceptable to Russia hinged on being able to forge international agreements to limit the size and scope of any subsequent posture enhancements. If measures such as the Adapted CFE were able to keep NATO conventional capabilities in the Baltics to a minimum and discourage major defense infrastructure improvements in these countries, then Russia's security might be only minimally affected. Russian frustration with the failure to secure these concessions from the West by diplomatic means set the stage for its willingness to resort to armed force in the subsequent crises in Georgia and Ukraine.

Conclusion

Russian decisionmakers had few options to resist NATO enlargement in the Baltics other than the ineffectual diplomatic measures they attempted. The absence of the kind of close political and economic ties that Russia had with some other former Soviet republics, such as Ukraine, left Moscow without a way of influencing the three republics' behavior and desire for closer association with the West. While Russian policy elites clearly disapproved of NATO enlargement, the Russian government under Putin sought to elicit greater respect for its strategic inter-

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[41] A poll conducted by the Levada Center in April 2004 found that half of Russians thought that NATO expansion demanded a stronger army, 13 percent felt no response was necessary, and 23 percent advocated greater cooperation with NATO against common enemies. This apparent expression of anti-NATO sentiment was contradicted by another result from the same poll, in which about one-third of Russians supported a closer relationship with NATO, while only a slightly larger share of respondents held the opposite view. See L. Sedov, "Aprel'skie zamery obshchestvennogo mneniia [April Measurements of Societal Opinion]," May 16, 2004. For a cross-section of Russian editorial opinion on the subject from 2004, see *Informatsionnyi Biulliten Komissi Rossiiskoi Demokraticheskoi partii 'IaBLOKO' po problemam oborony i mezhdunarodnoi bezopasnosti* [*Information Bulletin of the Commission of the Russian Democratic Party Yabloko on Defense and International Security Issues*], No. 15, April–June 2004.

ests by building a cooperative working relationship with NATO in areas of mutual concern, such as counterterrorism and nonproliferation. Putin even signaled that his country could live with an expanded NATO, so long as the organization respected Russia's perceived security needs. The unwillingness of NATO and the United States to acknowledge Russian interests through such measures as ratifying the Adapted CFE strengthened the position of hard-liners who argued that NATO was an intrinsically anti-Russian organization. In their view, more-decisive measures, including armed force, would be necessary to forestall NATO's further encroachment into Russia's near abroad.

2008 Georgia War

Russia's August 2008 war with Georgia was the first time since the early 1990s that Russia used military force to achieve its goals within what it believed to be its sphere of influence. Although motivated in large part by bilateral issues in the Russia-Georgia relationship, Russia's decision to intervene in Georgia also sent a sharp message to NATO, which had been drawing increasingly close to Georgia, even to the point of having promised the country eventual membership in the Alliance at the April 2008 Bucharest Summit.

Russian intervention to support separatists during the breakup of the Soviet Union led to a de facto split of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, shown in Figure A.1, from the remainder of Georgia and the introduction of a joint Commonwealth of Independent States peacekeeping force, dominated by Russia, in 1992.[42] The conflict remained frozen for many years, with the two regions enjoying de facto self-government, but starting in 2003, Georgia gradually increased its attempts to assert greater control over the breakaway regions.

In early August 2008, Georgian troops entered South Ossetia in an attempt to reestablish greater control over the region.[43] Russian troops, already positioned nearby, responded quickly, entering South Ossetia and quickly defeating Georgian forces. Russia then recognized the independence of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia as states clearly within the Russian sphere of influence.[44]

The Georgia War led to a crisis in Russia-NATO relations. Georgia had been drawing increasingly close to NATO since the 2003 Rose Revolution that brought President Saakashvili to power. The country had been promised eventual membership in NATO at the recently concluded Bucharest summit, and NATO and Georgia had just conducted joint exercises in Georgia in July.[45] NATO membership talks have since been delayed, apparently indefinitely, although official NATO statements continue to reiterate that they have not been abandoned.[46] After years of Russia attempting to build a partnership with NATO based around shared concerns regarding terrorism, the Georgia War and its aftermath represented a dramatic break in relations and foreshadowed the 2014 crisis over Ukraine.

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[42] Jim Nichol, *Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests*, Congressional Research Service, RL34618, March 3, 2009.

[43] Oksana Antonenko, "A War with No Winners," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 50, No. 5, 2008.

[44] "Russia Recognizes Abkhazia, South Ossetia," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 26, 2008.

[45] "U.S. Troops Start Training Exercise in Georgia," Reuters, July 15, 2008; and NATO, "Bucharest Summit Declaration," press release, Brussels, April 8, 2008.

[46] NATO, 2016b, Section 111.

Figure A.1
Map of Georgia

SOURCE: United Nations Cartographic Section, "Georgia High Detail Map.png," with amendments by User:ChrisO, August 12, 2008.

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Factors That Influenced Russian Decisionmaking

Several factors influenced the Russian decision to invade Georgia in 2008. Our analysis highlights three: Russia's perception of the threat of NATO expansion to Georgia; Russia's longstanding policy of supporting Russians living in neighboring countries; and, related to the first two factors, Russia's desire to defend a sphere of influence near its borders.

The Threat of NATO Expansion

One of Russia's main objectives in the Georgian conflict appears to have been to halt further NATO expansion on its borders. NATO membership typically includes a requirement that the applicant states have uncontested international borders and domestic stability.[47] The 2008 war undermined Georgia's ability to claim either.[48] Russia's assistance to and recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia undermined any attempts by the Georgian

[47] NATO, *Study on NATO Enlargement*, Brussels, September 3, 1995.

[48] Benjamin Friedman and Justin Logan, "Hitting the 'Stop Button' on NATO Expansion," Washington, D.C.: CATO Institute, undated; and "Russia FM: Moscow Will Do All It Can to Prevent NATO Membership for Ukraine, Georgia," Unian Press, April 9, 2008.

government to resolve the separatist disputes, creating a roadblock that seems likely to prevent Georgia from obtaining NATO membership for the foreseeable future. While the existence of territorial disputes might not alone prevent a state from obtaining NATO membership—Spain, for example, joined NATO despite its ongoing dispute with the United Kingdom over Gibraltar—Russia's demonstrated willingness to use force in these territorial disputes highlights the risk that NATO would be taking on if it were to extend security guarantees to Georgia under such circumstances.[49]

The April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest considered the possibility of granting membership action plans to Ukraine and Georgia, beginning the formal process for eventual membership in the Alliance. While the United States pushed for this move, opposition from key European states scuttled the attempt. However, the final communiqué for the summit did promise eventual NATO membership for both Ukraine and Georgia. This movement toward eventual Georgian membership in NATO also happened concurrently with heightened tensions with NATO on other issues, including the plan to develop a missile defense shield in Eastern Europe. Although the U.S. government stated that this enhancement to NATO defense capabilities was aimed at countering nuclear missiles that might originate from Iran, the Russian government saw this potential development as a direct threat to Russian security.[50] These tensions may have underlined for Russians the perception of NATO as threatening and, in turn, increased their willingness to take steps to prevent further expansion of the Alliance. The threat that Georgian membership in NATO posed was certainly a political and strategic issue but was also likely to affect Russian conventional military calculations. Georgia had been receiving military training and support from NATO since at least 2001, when Georgia began participating in NATO military exercises. Any enhanced relationship between Georgia and NATO would likely result in an increase in the capability of Georgian conventional forces, not to mention the possibility of forces from other NATO countries that might come to be based in Georgia.[51]

Support for Russians in Neighboring Countries

Russia's decision to use force to prevent South Ossetia and Abkhazia from returning to Georgian control was also informed by Russia's long-standing policy of supporting ethnic Russians and Russian speakers living abroad. For years, the Georgian government had protested what it viewed as increasing Russian involvement in South Ossetia. For example, since the early 1990s, South Ossetia had passport centers, and the Russian government frequently noted that the majority of individuals living in South Ossetia held Russian passports and that the Russian government had an obligation to protect its citizens.[52] Russian concerns along these lines were

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[49] Robert E. Hamilton, "Georgia's NATO Aspirations: Rhetoric and Reality," Foreign Policy Research Institute, July 2016; and Janusz Bugajski, *Georgian Lessons: Conflicting Russian and Western Interests in the Wider Europe*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 2010.

[50] Gregory Feifer, "Tensions Rise in U.S.-Russia Relationship," NPR, November 30, 2007; Karoun Demirjian, "With One Word, Congress Looks to Change a Legacy of Nuclear Defense," *Washington Post*, August 12, 2016; and Julia Borger and Luke Harding, "Missile Defense Deal May Avert Crisis in US-Russia Relations," *Guardian*, April 3, 2008.

[51] "Russia Slams NATO's Joint Drills with Georgia," Press TV, May 7, 2016; and "Lavrov Labels as 'Instigating' NATO's Invitation to Ukraine, Georgia," TASS, July 22, 2016.

[52] Paul A. Goble, "Russian 'Passportization,'" *New York Times*, September 9, 2008; Agnia Grigas, "Separatists Launch New 'Passportization' Strategy in Eastern Ukraine," Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council, March 23, 2016b; and Natalie Wild, "Does a State Have the Right to Protect Its Citizens Abroad," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 22, 2008.

similar to those expressed regarding Russian speakers in other post-Soviet countries, in keeping with Russia's "Compatriots" policy.[53] Some of these states have often instituted educational or economic policies that appear to disadvantage Russians or those identifying more closely with Russia, and Russian advocacy on their behalf can find a receptive audience—although whether these populations prefer closer political ties with Moscow varies substantially.[54]

The more complicated question for analysts of Russian behavior is exactly why Russia has chosen to make defending the rights of Russians or Russian speakers abroad such a focus of its foreign policy—and why it would decide to defend these rights using force in Georgia. To begin, Russian leaders may certainly feel genuine concern for their co-ethnics or citizens (although not all Russian speakers to whom the policy has been applied are either co-ethnics or Russian citizens), and such a policy may well be popular domestically.[55] However, the policy of defending Russians abroad provides numerous tools that Russia can use to interfere in the affairs of neighboring countries, and in doing so, the policy strongly supports Russian strategic goals of maintaining influence in the post-Soviet space.

Acting as a defender of Russians abroad provides Moscow with a rationale for intervening in the affairs of all states with sizable Russian populations, which include most former Soviet states. These interventions may be limited primarily to passportization or information operations, as in the Baltic States, or they may be more militarized, as they have been in Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova.[56] In the case of Georgia, the prospect of the Georgian military reclaiming control over South Ossetia after 16 years of separation—killing Russian peacekeepers in the process—would have represented a dramatic blow to Russian claims to be the protector of Russians abroad, with potentially serious domestic political ramifications.[57] It is also worth noting that Russia's recent agreement on the Alliance and Integration Between the Russian Federation and South Ossetia, which was signed in February 2015, as well as similar agreements signed between the Russian government and the Abkhazian government, suggest that Russian may plan to slowly integrate both Abkhazia and South Ossetia directly into the Russian Federation as autonomous republics.[58]

Defense of the Russian Sphere of Influence

While they have independent security and political dimensions, concerns over NATO expansion and the protection of Russians abroad also directly affect Russian prestige and Russia's broader efforts to maintain a sphere of influence near its borders. Since the 2003 Rose Revolution, Georgian President Saakashvili had pursued an increasingly independent, combative relationship with Russia, in a manner that represented a clear challenge to historical Russian influence in the region. A successful, militarily assertive Georgia with increasingly close links

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53 See, for example, Zakem, Saunders, and Antoun, 2015.

54 Tim Krohn, "Russian Latvians: Targets of Discrimination?" Deutsche Welle, May 1, 2014; Conley and Gerber, 2011, pp. 12–14; and International Crisis Group, *Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia*, Brussels, Europe Report No. 109, November 26, 2004.

55 Denis Volkov, "Supporting a War That Isn't: Russian Public Opinion and the Ukraine Conflict," Carnegie Moscow Center, September 9, 2015b.

56 Grigas, 2016b.

57 Antonenko, 2008.

58 Valeriy Dzutsev, "Russia to Strip Abkhazia and South Ossetia of Their Limited Sovereignty," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, March 18, 2015; and Law Library of Congress, *Russian Federation: Legal Aspects of War in Georgia*, September 2008.

to NATO would have been all but irreconcilable with Russian claims that it retains a special zone of influence in the post-Soviet space. It would also have represented a potentially damaging template for other nearby states to copy, which could hasten the decline of Russian influence throughout the region.

The Georgia War, while likely justifiable to the Russian leadership on numerous grounds, also allowed Moscow to send a clear message to both NATO and other non-NATO countries in the region that Russia was willing to bear substantial risks and costs to maintain this zone of influence.[59] To emphasize this point, Russia has established new military bases and facilities throughout South Ossetia and Abkhazia and occupies territory that encompasses approximately 20 percent of Georgia, despite the fact that the occupation is unlikely to be of any economic benefit.[60]

Russian involvement in the conflict also allowed Russia to demonstrate that the United States would not necessarily defend a country with which it had close relations, but not a treaty alliance, if doing so risked a wider war. This affected the U.S. image not only in Georgia but also in other countries in the region, reinforcing the idea that post-Soviet Eurasia is a region over which Russia is willing to fight but the United States and NATO are not.[61]

Conclusion

Russian acquiescence to Georgia's attempts to retake control over South Ossetia in 2008 would have marked the effective end, or at least the sharp decline, of Russia's claims to have a privileged sphere of influence over other post-Soviet states. Such acquiescence at a time when Georgia was actively seeking to gain NATO membership, and appeared to have reasonable prospects of doing so, and when many Russians living abroad were affected, would have signaled that Russia was not willing to act to prevent other post-Soviet states from leaving its orbit as well. The political and strategic costs of doing so, from Moscow's perspective, would have been severe. Instead, by intervening militarily, Russia confirmed that these developments would cross its redlines and that states seeking to do so would risk direct conflict with Russia.

Although this benefit could not necessarily be foreseen, the conflict also demonstrated that Russia could take military action within its sphere of influence with little or no major repercussions from the international community. Rather than attempt to punish Russia for taking these actions, the West's reactions were limited, and efforts to deescalate the situation and return relations to normal were soon pursued. For some Western states, particularly the Baltics, the Georgia War confirmed an image of Russia as an aggressive, dangerous actor that needed to be resisted to maintain security, but from the Russian perspective, the prospects of facing severe punishment for acting within its near abroad must have seemed diminished. Both sides therefore likely learned different lessons from the Georgia War—lessons that may have made the 2014 Ukraine crisis, and the manner in which it has persisted, more likely.

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[59] Antonenko, 2008, pp. 26–27.

[60] Saba Beridze, "The Crimea Conflict and the Lessons from Georgia," *Harvard Political Review*, March 29, 2014; Jacob W. Kipp, "The Russia-Georgia Conflict as Analyzed by the Center of Analysis of Strategies and Technologies in Moscow," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 7, No. 16, January 25, 2010; and Paul Rimple, "Economics Not Impacting Russian Support for Georgian Separatists," *EurasiaNet*, February 13, 2015.

[61] "Roundtable: Causes and Effects of the Russia-Georgia War," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, September 8, 2009; and Antonenko, 2008, pp. 29–32.

2014 Ukraine Crisis

In February 2014, Russia launched a military intervention in Ukraine in response to the Euromaidan protests and subsequent revolution that saw then–Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych removed from power. This initial intervention led to Russia annexing the Crimean peninsula, while a subsequent—still denied—Russian involvement helped to fuel Ukraine's ongoing civil war. Russia's interventions in Ukraine represent its most aggressive reaction to what it perceives as Western encroachment into its privileged position in the former Soviet Union. That reaction came in response to what was primarily a political challenge to Russia; there was no direct military threat to Moscow stemming from the 2014 revolution. However, Russia did perceive in Ukraine's political unrest and westward shift a threat to Russia's regional economic and security leadership. The case of Ukraine demonstrates Russia's willingness to react militarily to a provocation mainly political in nature.

Ukraine's Drift to the West

Ukraine's European Integration Efforts

Russia's post-Soviet Eurasian integration efforts envisioned Ukrainian participation as an imperative.[62] In Putin's view, the latest effort, the Eurasian Union project, needed Ukraine's involvement in order to be a viable economic bloc for the near abroad.[63] Ukraine, however, has not exhibited a similar level of enthusiasm for building such structures. The first of the Eurasian integration institutions, the Commonwealth of Independent States, was regarded by Ukrainian leaders as not so much an alliance with Russia as a mechanism for a "civilized divorce" that was the first step toward closer relations with Europe.[64] The EU, meanwhile, began to pursue ties with Ukraine and other states via the Eastern Partnership program.[65]

The Russian-Ukrainian relationship waxed and waned during the 2000s, but because of the political and regional divisions of Ukraine and its leadership, Moscow was unable to secure complete influence over a country conflicted over its geopolitical orientation.[66] Then–Ukrainian President Viktor Yuschenko was outwardly supportive of a European shift for Ukraine. Meanwhile, the leaders that bookended his tenure, Presidents Leonid Kuchma and Yanukovych, at best tried to strike a balance between European and Russian interests.[67] Even Yanukovych, a more palatable leader from Russia's perspective, was reluctant to buy into Eurasian integration fully. Russia's offer to join the Customs Union—a stepping stone toward membership in the Eurasian Union—was rebuffed in 2011.[68] Instead, Yanukovych pursued

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[62] Trenin, 2011, p. 88; and Neil MacFarlane and Anand Menon, "The EU and Ukraine," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 56, No. 3, 2014, p. 97.

[63] Hill and Gaddy, 2013, p. 248.

[64] James Sherr, "Ukraine: Door Closed?" in S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell, eds., *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and Its Discontents*, Washington, D.C., and Stockholm: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, 2014, p. 126

[65] MacFarlane and Menon, 2014, p. 96.

[66] MacFarlane and Menon, 2014, p. 98; Olexiy Haran, "Polarizing the Country? Yanukovych's Authoritarian Game Between Russia and the EU on the Eve of Ukraine's 2012 Parliamentary Elections," PONARS Eurasia, Policy Memo No. 204, June 2012, pp. 2–3.

[67] Sherr, 2014, pp. 126–127.

[68] Andrei Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's Last Stand: The Sources of Russia's Ukraine Policy," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 2015.

an Association Agreement with the EU. Although he reversed course in late 2013 and chose to shelve the Association Agreement and conclude an economic deal with Russia that might have prompted greater integration between Ukraine and Russia, this move precipitated Yanukovych's fall from power and the 2014 revolution.[69]

Russia saw the EU's Association Agreement as an acute challenge to the Eurasian Union. Putin had hoped that the union—especially with Ukrainian participation—would have created deeply integrated economic relationships in the near abroad. Given Ukraine's importance to the Russian economy, especially in the energy sector, building such ties with Ukraine under the auspices of the Eurasian Union was paramount. EU Association Agreements, from Russia's perspective, threatened to pull apart these economic connections, although Russia did not signal strong concerns in this area before 2013.[70] No less important was the political challenge. According to Andrei Tsygankov, the Putin regime saw the Eurasian Union as "not only strictly an economic arrangement, but also an alternative means of defending sovereignty and national unity from political encroachment by the EU."[71] Thus, the underlying rationales for the Eurasian Union—economic interconnectedness and political independence from the West—were challenged in an unacceptable manner by Ukraine's shift toward Europe.[72]

NATO Enlargement

Though troubling enough for the above reasons, the Ukraine-EU relationship was also seen by Russia as a thinly veiled precursor to NATO expansion into Ukraine.[73] From the early 2000s, the prospect of Ukrainian membership in NATO may have been, for Russia, the most worrisome manifestation of the wider phenomenon of NATO enlargement. Aspirations for NATO accession began in earnest in 2003, when a Ukrainian national security law identified membership in the Alliance as an important foreign policy goal.[74] The Ukrainian President at that time, Kuchma, supported this objective and believed it could be accomplished in an even-handed fashion that accounted for both European and Russian interests.[75] President Yuschenko's post–Orange Revolution administration was more adamant about the issue and sought progress toward membership within a few years of the 2004 turnover.[76]

At the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, members reviewed the possibility of granting membership action plans to Ukraine and Georgia. Inviting these states to begin these talks would have initiated the formal process for eventual membership in the Alliance. Despite U.S. support for the move, NATO as a whole declined to extend membership action plans to Ukraine and Georgia. However, the post-summit communiqué promised—without offering a timeline—eventual NATO membership for both states. Concerns about Russia's reaction to formal invitations played a role in this more limited commitment, although this promise

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[69] Sherr, 2014, pp. 127–128.

[70] Hill and Gaddy, 2013, pp. 358–359; Tsygankov, 2015, p. 288.

[71] Tsygankov, 2015, p. 291.

[72] This suggests that Ukraine in 2014 was faced with a bleak set of choices: either reject greater European integration and better long-term prospects for economic development or face the invasion and occupation of substantial parts of its territory.

[73] John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2014, p. 79.

[74] Taras Kuzio, "Ukraine Closes Road to NATO Membership," *Daily Eurasia Monitor*, Vol. 7, No. 130, July 7, 2010.

[75] Trenin, 2011, p. 90.

[76] Tsygankov, 2015, p. 282.

still helped to guarantee Russian involvement in the 2008 Georgia War, as discussed earlier.[77] Yuschenko's successor, Yanukovych, abandoned the goal of NATO membership and supported a "non-bloc" foreign policy.[78] The immediate danger of NATO accession subsided with these developments, but the potential threat was not lost on Russia. Ukrainian membership in NATO would carry with it several negative consequences from the Russian viewpoint. Basing for the Black Sea Fleet would be compromised, creating a vacuum in the region that the United States and its allies could easily fill through enhanced military presence or even new military bases.[79] In addition, Russia's historical perception of Ukraine as a buffer state would be irrevocably violated.[80] By intervening to destabilize and effectively partition Ukraine, Russia effectively blocked prospects for Ukraine's accession to NATO for the foreseeable future.

Domestic Factors

A Diversionary Intervention

Another possible factor that explains Russia's 2014 actions in Ukraine is the decline of the "Putin Consensus" and the regime's need to distract the populace from the country's economic and political shortcomings. The consensus prevailed throughout much of the early 2000s, as Russians accepted a degree of corruption and authoritarianism in the regime in exchange for economic development and an improved standard of living.[81] This arrangement started to falter in 2011 when poor Russian economic performance began to negatively affect Putin's approval ratings.[82] This dissatisfaction manifested itself in a more concrete fashion with antiregime protests in 2011 and 2012. Meanwhile, the attitude of Russia's elite made rectifying economic sluggishness with structural reforms and anticorruption campaigns an unlikely course, one that would have jeopardized the elite's powerful and lucrative position in the country.[83] With the social contract of the 2000s failing and with poor prospects to revive it, the regime needed a new source of legitimacy to rebuild its support base. Putin embarked on a new "rally around the flag" mission that could deflect attention away from Russia's domestic issues—a mission that has seen Russia pursue the annexation of Crimea, further intervention in Ukraine, and the attendant and ongoing conflict with the West.[84] Sergei Guriev argues, "Another important tool of the regime in the coming years will continue to be its aggressive foreign policy. Economic hardship will be easier to justify in the presence of external enemies."[85] Restoring Soviet-

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[77] Paul Gallis, *The NATO Summit at Bucharest*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RS22847, May 5, 2008.

[78] Haran, 2012, p. 2.

[79] Trenin, 2011, p. 91; Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 77.

[80] Tsygankov, 2015, p. 288.

[81] 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*, Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 2015, p. 20.

[82] Kirill Rogov, "Triumphs and Crises of Plebiscitary Presidentialism," in Leon Aron, ed., *Putin's Russia: How It Rose, How It Is Maintained, and How It Might End*, Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 2015, p. 93.

[83] Ben Judah and Andrew Wilson, "The End of the Putin Consensus," European Council on Foreign Relations, March 1, 2012, pp. 2–3; and Guriev, 2015, p. 16.

[84] Rogov, 2015, p. 102; Guriev, 2015, p. 20.

[85] Guriev, 2015, p. 19.

era power and influence in the near abroad is currently a popular, unifying concept in Russia, one that has thus far gained broad support from the Russian people.[86]

The Threat of Revolutions to Regime Survival

Since the 2003 and 2004 color revolutions in parts of the former Soviet Union, including Ukraine, Russia had been wary of popular unrest in its near abroad. The Putin regime has seen a Western hand in political upheavals in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and the Middle East. Russia has been suspicious of U.S.-led democracy promotion efforts in Ukraine and sees the 2014 revolution as their end product.[87] The Euromaidan and other uprisings were threatening to Russia because of its fears that it may be next in line; throngs of disaffected citizens in Kyiv might lead to similar events playing out in Moscow.[88] The Orange Revolution in 2004 had elicited similar fears of subversive Western designs for the post-Soviet space; its aftermath did not bring this outcome to fruition, but it did worsen Russian-Ukrainian relations.[89] Ten years later, Russia could not help but see a repeat of the challenge to its regional hegemony and its relationship with a strategically important neighbor.[90] Moreover, that challenge might develop into a regional trend toward popular uprisings that could leave the Putin regime struggling to maintain power.[91]

Conclusion

Moscow's decision to respond to the change of government in Kyiv with military intervention and territorial annexation highlights the extent to which political developments in post-Soviet states, and perhaps in Ukraine most of all, are seen as high-level strategic challenges for the current Russian regime. Ukraine is a state of vital interest for Russia, and with these interventions, Russia demonstrated the lengths to which it is willing to go to prevent Ukraine from fully joining Western institutions. Although these actions also appear to have created a fundamental rupture between Russia and the remainder of Ukraine, eliminating any near-term possibility of closer ties between the two, Moscow appears to have calculated that the downside risks of allowing Ukraine to possibly be integrated into key Western institutions represented the greater cost.

It is important to emphasize, however, that even in this area of vital interest, Russia's intervention in Ukraine has been highly sensitive to costs. Russian support for anti-Kyiv rebels in the Donbass was initially limited, only later expanding to include regular Russian army units when it looked like defeat was possible.[92] Russia has taken great pains to continue to deny that its forces are taking part in the conflict in eastern Ukraine, and casualties that do

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[86] Elias Götz, "Putin, the State, and War: The Causes of Russia's Near Abroad Assertion Revisited," *International Studies Review*, 2016, p. 4.

[87] Tsygankov, 2015, p. 292; Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 80.

[88] Larrabee, Wilson, and Gordon, 2015, p. viii.

[89] Trenin, 2011, p. 89.

[90] Tsygankov, 2015, p. 292.

[91] Götz, 2016, pp. 6–7.

[92] Maksymilian Czuperski, John Herbst, Eliot Higgins, Alina Polyakova, and Damon Wilson, *Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin's War in Ukraine*, Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council, May 2015, p. 5.

occur are not acknowledged in state-run media.[93] The economic costs that Russia has born in the wake of the Ukraine crisis appear to be substantially greater, although these have been primarily a result of the decline in oil prices rather than the effects of Western sanctions.[94] Most analyses have concluded that the effect of sanctions on Russian government revenue and the value of the ruble have been relatively modest in comparison with the declines in hydrocarbon prices that occurred over roughly the same period.[95] Where sanctions do appear to have had notable impact is on financial flows needed for long-term investment and the ability of even nonsanctioned firms to borrow to facilitate trade.[96] In addition, the Kremlin appears to have taken steps to ensure that elites close to the regime are insulated from these negative economic effects, which further limits domestic sources of capital available to nonpolitically connected economic actors.[97] There seems to be a much greater willingness to allow the ordinary economy to bear a substantial burden—one that is readily blamed on the West as an attempt to punish Russia for trying to reclaim its rightful role in the world.[98]

Overall, while the intervention in eastern Ukraine certainly represents a substantial increase in the costs that Russia has demonstrated it is willing to bear to defend its privileged sphere of influence, these costs, particularly in military and domestic political terms, remain quite limited. Instead, Russia has generally acted opportunistically, both to seize Crimea and to destabilize eastern Ukraine at Kyiv's moment of maximal weakness.

Summary of Cases

We selected these four cases to illustrate how several of the key factors identified in Chapter Three have affected Russian decisionmaking in prominent instances. While some factors, such as the overall balance of capabilities between Russia and NATO, did not vary dramatically across these cases, other factors did, and their variation helps to explain the very different Russian responses. Perhaps most importantly, the Georgia and Ukraine cases were particularly salient for Russia, involving challenges to Russian authority and influence in locations of vital strategic concern, although not military threats to Russia. From the Russian perspective, a failure to respond aggressively in these two cases would have risked abandoning claims to a sphere of influence in Russia's near abroad, inviting greater Western integration and, in turn,

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93 Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "The Unusual Difficulty of Tracking Russia's Dead in Ukraine and Syria," *Washington Post*, October 27, 2015.

94 Lilia Shevtsova, "The Sanctions on Russia: How Hard Do They Bite?" *American Interest*, April 4, 2016.

95 Christian Dreger, Konstantin A. Kholodilin, Dirk Ulbricht, and Jarko Fidrmuc, "Between the Hammer and the Anvil: The Impact of Economic Sanctions and Oil Prices on Russia's Ruble," *Journal of Comparative Economics*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 2016; and Yelena Tuzova and Faryal Qayum, "Global Oil Glut and Sanctions: The Impact on Putin's Russia," *Energy Policy*, Vol. 90, 2016.

96 Susanne Oxenstierna and Per Olsson, "The Economic Sanctions Against Russia: Impact and Prospects of Success," Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), FOI-R-4097-SE, September, 2015; and Matthieu Crozet and Julian Hinz, *Collateral Damage: The Impact of the Russia Sanctions on Sanctioning Countries' Exports*, Forum for Research in Empirical International Trade, Working Paper No. 2016-16, 2016.

97 Priyanka Boghani, "What's Been the Effect of Western Sanctions on Russia?" Frontline, January 13, 2015; Oxenstierna and Olsson, 2015; and Elizabeth Piper and Timothy Heritage, "Sanctions Bind Russia's Energy Elite to Putin," Reuters, October 29, 2014.

98 Michael Birnbaum, "A Year into a Conflict with Russia, Are Sanctions Working?" *Washington Post*, March 27, 2015.

worsening potential domestic political and strategic threats to the regime. While Kosovo and the Baltics are still areas of historical concern for Russia, the political and strategic challenges they present did not and do not appear to rise to the same level as those presented by Georgia and Ukraine. Moreover, in Kosovo, Russia lacked the clear advantage in local capabilities that it would leverage in both Georgia and Ukraine.

Taken together, these cases also illustrate the evolution in Russian perceptions of U.S. and NATO intentions over the past 20 years.[99] Russian leaders note with concern such factors as successive rounds of NATO expansion, a refusal to implement CFE-style conventional force limitations, and the development of other capabilities (such as BMD) that Russia regards as threatening. All of these have led many Russian elites to conclude that, even if a direct NATO attack on Russia is unlikely, the broader goals of the United States and NATO do not appear to be compatible with Russia's security interests and must therefore be more actively resisted. The manner in which the Kosovo and Baltic accession cases were resolved — very much against the wishes of Russia and without substantive concession to Russia's concerns — helped inform Russian willingness to run greater risks and incur greater costs to see that the Georgia and Ukraine cases were resolved on Russia's terms.

The cases also show the heightening of Russian concerns about the potential threats to regime security that Western integration and democratization of states in its near abroad represent. Russian sensitivity to domestic threats to regime stability appears to have intensified, particularly since the surprisingly large protests following the 2011 elections. Color revolutions that may act as models for similar events in Russia are treated with much greater concern, as can be seen in the very different Russian reactions to the 2004 Orange Revolution and the 2014 Euromaidan.

Overall, the views of Russia's elite, and particularly of Putin, toward NATO appear to have hardened since, at the latest, 2007. From the Russian perspective, the apparent benefits of cooperation have shrunk and the apparent dangers of failing to aggressively assert Russian interests have expanded. It should be emphasized, however, that in these cases, Russia demonstrated a substantial willingness to incur large economic costs to achieve its goals but a very limited willingness to risk military losses. This has implications not only for the types of Western measures that are likely to deter Russian aggression but also for the types of aggression that Russia is likely to undertake. The threat of losing access to Western markets may not be sufficient to deter Russia from taking actions to protect what it views as its vital strategic interests, but there is little evidence that the current Russian leadership would be willing to risk a direct confrontation that has the potential for substantial military losses or defeat.

These observations, however, are most relevant in conditions broadly similar to what we have seen in the past. The potential for important underlying conditions — such as the relative security of the Russian regime or the perceptions of NATO's capabilities and intentions — to change in the near future must also be considered, particularly because this is the period during which decisions will be made about possible future NATO posture enhancements on the Alliance's eastern flank.

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[99] See Appendix B for a more detailed look at notable events that have shaped this evolution in the Russia-NATO relationship since 1995.

APPENDIX B

Key NATO and Russian Interactions, 1995–2015

Russia and NATO have a long, eventful history of interactions since 1995. There have been numerous perceived provocations on both sides over vital political, economic, and strategic issues. Although patterns of action and reaction from the past will not necessarily hold in the future, they still provide important context and can be essential for understanding current perceptions and motivations on both sides.

Table B.1 provides a chronological summary of the most notable of these actions and reactions between NATO countries and Russia. This table is by no means an exhaustive record. Instead, it is intended as a quick reference to notable events and points of tension in the NATO-Russia relationship since 1995. For discussions about how these events reflect and have informed Russian actions and perceptions, see Chapter Three.

Table B.1
Key NATO and Russian Interactions, 1995–2015

Date		NATO	Russia
1995	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr		
	May–Jun		
	Jul–Aug	• NATO air campaigns target Bosnian Serb forces, leading to Dayton Accords.[1]	• Russians lodge strong political protests against NATO treatment of Bosnian Serbs.[2]
	Sep–Oct		
	Nov–Dec		
1996	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr		
	May–Jun		
	Jul–Aug		
	Sep–Oct		
	Nov–Dec		

[1] Paul Kubicek, "Russian Foreign Policy and the West," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 114, No. 4, 1999, pp. 552–553.

[2] Kubicek, 1999.

Table B.1—Continued

Date		NATO	Russia
1997	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr		
	May–Jun		
	Jul–Aug	• At the Madrid Summit, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland are invited to join NATO.[3]	• Russia begins a diplomatic campaign against NATO accession, stalls ratification of the second Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II), and revises its Kaliningrad posture.[4]
	Sep–Oct	• U.S. troops practice parachuting into Kazakhstan in an exercise with Central Asian states.[5]	• Russia has a minor participation in the exercise but expresses substantial concerns.[6]
	Nov–Dec		
1998	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr		
	May–Jun		
	Jul–Aug		
	Sep–Oct		
	Nov–Dec		
1999	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr	• The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland officially join NATO; the Baltic States are given a path to do so.[7]	• Russia expresses strong diplomatic protest against NATO expansion and unequivocal opposition to further eastward expansion.[8]
	May–Jun	• NATO bombs Yugoslavia to protect Kosovar Albanians.[9]	• In response to the Kosovo campaign, Russia suspends cooperation with NATO; attempts to seize the Pristina International Airport in Yugoslavia; and revises Russian security doctrine.[10]
	Jul–Aug		
	Sep–Oct		
	Nov–Dec		

[3] Joseph Laurence Black, *Russia Faces NATO Expansion: Bearing Gifts or Bearing Arms?* New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, pp. 23–27.

[4] Black, 2000.

[5] Douglas J. Gillert, "U.S. Ventures Cautiously into Former Soviet Territory," American Forces Press Service, October 6, 1997.

[6] "CENTRAZBAT '97 Set to Get Underway," United Press International, September 14, 1997.

[7] Black, 2000.

[8] Black, 2000.

[9] Sharyl Cross, *Russia and NATO Toward the 21st Century: Conflicts and Peacekeeping in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo*, NATO-EAPC Research Fellowship Award Final Report, August 2001.

[10] Oksana Antonenko, "Russia, NATO and European Security After Kosovo," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 1999.

Table B.1—Continued

Date		NATO	Russia
2000	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr		
	May–Jun		
	Jul–Aug		
	Sep–Oct		
	Nov–Dec		
2001	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr		
	May–Jun		
	Jul–Aug		
	Sep–Oct	• U.S. pursues closer antiterrorism cooperation with Russia after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.[11]	• In response to U.S. overtures, Russia provides strong support, intelligence-sharing, and acquiescence to U.S. presence in Central Asia.[12]
	Nov–Dec	• U.S. announces its intention to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.[13]	• Russia issues restrained protest over the U.S. Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty withdrawal: a symbolic statement that Russia will not be bound by START II.[14]
2002	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr		
	May–Jun		
	Jul–Aug		
	Sep–Oct		
	Nov–Dec	• Seven more states, including the Baltics, are formally invited to join NATO.[15]	• Russia lodges diplomatic protests against further NATO expansion and strengthens ties with Belarus.[16]
2003	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr	• A U.S.-led coalition invades Iraq over Russian objections.[17]	• Russia indicates strong diplomatic opposition to the Iraq invasion, but this has little immediate spillover to other areas of cooperation.[18]

[11] Thomas Devold, *US Policy Toward Russia After 9/11: Between Cooperation and Containment*, Oslo: Institutt for Forsvarsstudier, 2008.

[12] Devold, 2008.

[13] Lynn F. Rusten, *U.S. Withdrawal from the Antiballistic Missile Treaty*, Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction, National Defense University, Case Study Series, January 2010.

[14] Rusten, 2010.

[15] Mark Kramer, "NATO, the Baltic States and Russia: A Framework for Sustainable Enlargement," *International Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 4, 2002.

[16] Putin, 2002.

[17] Devold, 2008, pp. 45–47.

[18] Devold, 2008, pp. 45–47.

Table B.1—Continued

Date		NATO	Russia
	May–Jun		
	Jul–Aug		
	Sep–Oct		
	Nov–Dec	• The Georgian Rose Revolution, supported by the United States, leads to the fall of President Eduard Shevardnadze.[19]	• Russia strongly opposes the Rose Revolution and accuses the United States of orchestrating the change in regime.[20]
2004	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr	• Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia formally join NATO.[21]	• Russia voices strong opposition to the NATO accession of the Baltic States, but NATO's moves had been telegraphed long in advance.[22]
	May–Jun	• The NATO Baltic Air Policing mission starts.[23]	• Russia's official response to the Baltic Air Policing mission is muted; Russia issues statements that it did not see this as a threat.[24]
	Jul–Aug		
	Sep–Oct		
	Nov–Dec	• The Orange Revolution results in a reversal of Ukraine's presidential election, which is a loss for the Kremlin-backed candidate.[25]	• Russia strongly opposes the Orange Revolution and accuses the United States of orchestrating the change in regime.[26]
2005	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr		
	May–Jun		
	Jul–Aug		
	Sep–Oct		
	Nov–Dec	• The United States and Romania sign a basing agreement (Joint Task Force East).[27]	• Russia opposes the Joint Task Force East agreement, which it later cites as part of the rationale for Russian suspension of the CFE Treaty in 2007.[28]

[19] Devold, 2008, pp. 54–55.

[20] Devold, 2008, pp. 54–55.

[21] "Putin Calls New Nato 'Unhelpful,'" BBC News, April 8, 2004.

[22] "Putin Calls New Nato 'Unhelpful,'" 2004.

[23] NATO, "Norway Takes the Lead in NATO's Baltic Air Policing Mission," April 30, 2015a; and Jos Schoofs, "Baltic Air Policing," *Air Forces Monthly*, August 2007.

[24] Karabeshkin and Spechler, 2007.

[25] Devold, 2008, p. 55.

[26] Devold, 2008, p. 55.

[27] Moldovan, Pantev, and Rhodes, 2009.

[28] Moldovan, Pantev, and Rhodes, 2009.

Table B.1—Continued

Date		NATO	Russia
2006	Jan–Feb	• NATO countries have a limited political reaction to the gas shutdown. As a result of the shutdown, some countries (such as Germany) explore diversification.[29]	• Russia shuts off gas deliveries to Ukraine in a pricing dispute, affecting supplies to the EU.[30]
	Mar–Apr		
	May–Jun	• The United States and Bulgaria sign a basing agreement (Joint Task Force East).[31]	• Russia opposes the Joint Task Force East agreement, which it later cites as part of the rationale for Russian suspension of the CFE Treaty.[32]
	Jul–Aug		
	Sep–Oct		
	Nov–Dec		
2007	Jan–Feb	• Formal negotiations over Ground-Based Interceptors for missile defense in Poland and the Czech Republic begin.[33]	• Russia issues strong denunciations of missile defense as a "clear threat" and threatens "negative consequences" for host states.[34]
	Mar–Apr		
	May–Jun	• Estonia relocates a World War II memorial dedicated to the Red Army (known as the Bronze Soldier incident).[35]	• Russia suspends participation in the CFE Treaty, citing BMD and NATO expansion threats.[36] • In response to the Bronze Soldier incident, Russia encourages protests for minority rights in Estonia, and Estonia sees massive cyber attacks with possible links to the Russian government.[37]
	Jul–Aug		• Russia resumes long-range strategic bomber flights for the first time since the Cold War.[38]
	Sep–Oct		
	Nov–Dec		

[29] Tom Parfitt, "Russia Turns Off Supplies to Ukraine in Payment Row, and EU Feels the Chill," *Guardian*, January 2, 2006.

[30] Parfitt, 2006.

[31] Moldovan, Pantev, and Rhodes, 2009.

[32] Moldovan, Pantev, and Rhodes, 2009.

[33] Steven A. Hildreth and Carl Ek, *Long-Range Ballistic Missile Defense in Europe*, Congressional Research Service, RL34051, September 23, 2008, p. 7; and Julianne Smith, *The NATO-Russia Relationship: Defining Moment or Déjà Vu?* Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2008, pp. 10–11.

[34] "US to Start Talks on Eastern Europe Missile Defence System," Agence France-Presse, January 22, 2007; and Keir Giles and Andrew Monaghan, *European Missile Defense and Russia*, Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2014, pp. 11–16.

[35] Martin Ehala, "The Bronze Soldier: Identity Threat and Maintenance in Estonia," *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2009.

[36] Andrew E. Kramer and Thom Shanker, "Russia Suspends Arms Agreement over U.S. Shield," *New York Times*, July 15, 2007.

[37] Ehala, 2009; and Ian Traynor, "Russia Accused of Unleashing Cyberwar to Disable Estonia," *Guardian*, May 16, 2007.

[38] Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia Resumes Patrols by Nuclear Bombers," *New York Times*, August 18, 2007.

Table B.1—Continued

Date		NATO	Russia
2008	Jan–Feb	• Kosovo declares independence from Serbia, and that independence is recognized by the United States and some European states.[39]	• Russia strongly opposes Kosovar independence while arguing that it sets a precedent for recognizing other breakaway regions.[40]
	Mar–Apr	• At Bucharest Summit, NATO promises Georgia and Ukraine eventual NATO membership.[41]	• Russia issues a warning that Georgia and Ukraine joining NATO would be a "direct threat" to Russia; the NATO promise contributes to Russia's later decision to intervene in Georgia.[42]
	May–Jun		
	Jul–Aug	• The United States and Georgia hold a joint Immediate Response exercise.[43] • Georgia moves troops into South Ossetia to reclaim government control.[44] • The U.S. Navy performs operations in the Black Sea to assist Georgia after the Russia-Georgia war.[45]	• Russian forces conduct an exercise with 8,000 troops, which is used to lay the operational groundwork for the invasion.[46] • Russia invades and defeats Georgia, then recognizes the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.[47]
	Sep–Oct		• Russia sends two Tu-160 strategic bombers to Venezuela to conduct exercises.[48]
	Nov–Dec		• Russia strengthens links with far-right Hungarian party Jobbik, including alleged financial ties, establishing a pattern of support for European far-right parties.[49]
2009	Jan–Feb		• Russia shuts off gas deliveries to Ukraine and incentivizes Kyrgyzstan to revoke U.S. access to a military base in Manas.[50]

[39] George Friedman, "Kosovar Independence and the Russian Reaction," *Geopolitical Weekly*, Stratfor, February 20, 2008.

[40] Steven Pifer, *Reversing the Decline: An Agenda for U.S.-Russian Relations in 2009*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, Policy Paper No. 10, January 2009.

[41] NATO, 2008.

[42] Steven Erlanger, "Putin, at NATO Meeting, Curbs Combative Rhetoric," *New York Times*, April 5, 2008; and Vincent Morelli, Paul Belkin, Carl Ek, Jim Nichol, and Steven Woehrel, *NATO Enlargement: Albania, Croatia, and Possible Future Candidates*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL34701, 2008.

[43] "U.S. Troops Start Training Exercise in Georgia," 2008.

[44] International Crisis Group, *Russia vs. Georgia: The Fallout*, Brussels, Europe Report No. 195, August 22, 2008.

[45] Andrew E. Kramer, "NATO Ships in Black Sea Raise Alarms in Russia," *New York Times*, August 27, 2008.

[46] Johanna Popjanevski, "From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia," in Svante E. Cornell and S. Fredrick Starr, eds., *Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, New York: Taylor & Francis, 2009, p. 148.

[47] International Crisis Group, 2008; "Russia Recognizes Abkhazia, South Ossetia," 2008.

[48] Ian James and Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russian Bombers Land in Venezuela for Drills," Associated Press, September 11, 2008; and Javier Corrales and Carlos A. Romero, *US-Venezuela Relations Since the 1990s: Coping with Midlevel Security Threats*, New York: Routledge, 2012, pp. 32–33.

[49] Péter Krekó, Lóránt Györi, and Attila Juhász, "Russia's Far-Right Friends in Europe—Hungary," *Russian Analytical Digest*, No. 167, May 6, 2015, p. 6; and Political Capital, "The Kremlin Connections of the Hungarian Far-Right," Stratfor, April 20, 2015.

[50] Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia Cuts Off Gas Deliveries to Ukraine," *New York Times*, January 1, 2009; and David Trilling and Deirdre Tynan, "Kyrgyzstan: President Bakiyev Wants to Close US Military Base Outside Bishkek," EurasiaNet, February 2, 2009.

Table B.1—Continued

Date		NATO	Russia
	Mar–Apr	• Albania and Croatia join NATO.[51]	• Russia's diplomatic reaction to Albanian and Croatian NATO accession is limited.[52]
	May–Jun		
	Jul–Aug		
	Sep–Oct	• The United States announces its European Phased Adaptive Approach to missile defense.[53]	• Russia's initial reaction is positive on news that the United States cancels the construction of a third missile defense site in Europe; then, once the details of the European Phased Adaptive Approach become clear, Russia's reaction is negative.[54] • Russia conducts large-scale Zapad 2009 exercise that reportedly includes a simulated nuclear strike on Warsaw.[55]
	Nov–Dec		
2010	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr		
	May–Jun		
	Jul–Aug		
	Sep–Oct		
	Nov–Dec		
2011	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr	• NATO begins military intervention in Libya.[56]	• Russia abstains on the United Nations Security Council's Libya resolution and grows critical of the shift from humanitarian protection to regime change.[57]
	May–Jun		
	Jul–Aug		

[51] NATO, "NATO Secretary General Welcomes Albania and Croatia as NATO Members," April 1, 2009b.

[52] "Albania, Croatia Become NATO Members," Associated Press, April 1, 2009.

[53] White House, "Fact Sheet on U.S. Missile Defense Policy: A 'Phased, Adaptive Approach' for Missile Defense in Europe," Washington, D.C., September 17, 2009.

[54] Giles and Monaghan, 2014, pp. 17–18.

[55] Roger McDermott, "Zapad 2009 Rehearses Countering a NATO Attack on Belarus," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 6, No. 179, September 30, 2009; and Stephen J. Blank, "Moscow Pulls Back the Curtain on Zapad 2013," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 10, No. 118, June 21, 2013a.

[56] Hannah VanHoose, "Understanding the Russian Response to the Intervention in Libya," Center for American Progress, April 12, 2011; and Joshua Foust, "Syria and the Pernicious Consequences of Our Libya Intervention," *Atlantic*, February 6, 2012.

[57] VanHoose, 2011.

Table B.1—Continued

Date		NATO	Russia
	Sep–Oct	• With the death of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, NATO ends military intervention in Libya.[58]	• Russia's diplomatic reaction to the fall of Gaddafi's regime is strongly negative, including charges that the West is not respecting Russian interests in Libya.[59]
	Nov–Dec		
2012	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr		
	May–Jun		
	Jul–Aug		
	Sep–Oct		
	Nov–Dec		
2013	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr		• Russia simulates bombing military targets in Sweden.[60]
	May–Jun		
	Jul–Aug		
	Sep–Oct	• The United States threatens strikes against Syria over use of chemical weapons.[61]	• Russia facilitates the removal of Syrian weapons to avoid U.S. strikes and reinforce its own role in Syria.[62] • Russia's large-scale Zapad 2013 exercise focuses on Russian operations against the Baltics.[63]
	Nov–Dec		
2014	Jan–Feb	• A Ukrainian revolution ousts Yanukovych in favor of a pro-Western government.[64]	• Russia invades and annexes Crimea, then intervenes in eastern Ukraine.[65]

[58] Foust, 2012.

[59] Foust, 2012.

[60] Roland Oliphant, "Russia 'Simulated a Nuclear Strike' Against Sweden, Nato Admits," *Telegraph*, February 4, 2016.

[61] Karen DeYoung, "How the United States, Russia Arrived at Deal on Syria's Chemical Weapons," *Washington Post*, September 16, 2013.

[62] DeYoung, 2013.

[63] Stephen J. Blank, "What Do the Zapad 2013 Exercises Reveal? (Part One)," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 10, No. 177, October 4, 2013b.

[64] Higgins and Kramer, 2015.

[65] Larrabee, Wilson, and Gordon, 2015.

Table B.1—Continued

Date		NATO	Russia
	Mar–Apr	• The United States and EU lead sanctions against Russian entities over the seizure of Crimea.[66] • U.S. ERI includes rotational deployment of company-sized forces to the Baltic States and Poland.[67]	• Russia issues countersanctions and sharply increases provocative military activity throughout the region.[68]
	May–Jun	• The Baltic Air Policing mission is temporarily expanded to 12 fighters.[69]	• Russia shuts off gas deliveries to Ukraine in a pricing dispute.[70]
	Jul–Aug	• The United States and EU put in place expanded sanctions against Russia over its involvement in eastern Ukraine.[71]	• Russia further restricts trade and threatens to close Russian airspace to Western carriers.[72] • Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 is shot down over Ukraine, killing all 298 people on board.[73]
	Sep–Oct	• President Obama gives a speech in Tallinn guaranteeing U.S. commitment to NATO.[74]	• Russia allegedly abducts an Estonian counterintelligence agent from Estonian territory.[75]
	Nov–Dec		• Russia provides loans to the French National Front political party, allegedly for supporting the annexation of Crimea.[76]
2015	Jan–Feb		
	Mar–Apr		
	May–Jun	• The United States announces plans to preposition military equipment in Eastern European countries.[77]	• Russia condemns the prepositioning as escalatory and promises to increase troops on its western border; Russia moves Iskander missile systems to Kaliningrad.[78]

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Table B.1—Continued

Date	NATO	Russia
Jul–Aug		
Sep–Oct	• Reports indicate U.S. plans to modernize B61 nuclear weapons in Germany.[79]	• Russia issues diplomatic protests against U.S. nuclear modernization and threatens to again deploy its Iskander missile systems.[80]
Nov–Dec	• Montenegro receives a formal invitation to join NATO.[81] • Turkey shoots down a Russian SU-24 war plane near the Syrian border.[82]	• Strong condemnation of NATO accession.[83] • Turkish incident prompts Russia to deploy its S-400 missile system to Syria and issue sanctions against Turkey.[84]

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is in the process of implementing posture enhancements to increase capabilities on its eastern flank, and the escalation in tensions between Russia and NATO since 2014 has led analysts to propose measures that are even more extensive. However, Russia's likely reactions to such posture enhancements remain understudied. In this report, we develop a framework that analysts can use to assess likely Russian reactions to ongoing and proposed NATO posture enhancements in Europe. We develop this framework by assessing Russian strategic writing, the broader international relations literature, and the history of post–Cold War interactions between Russia and NATO. Our analysis suggests that Russian reactions will depend on 11 key factors that capture the strategic context, the Russian domestic context, and the characteristics of the proposed posture enhancements. We then illustrate how this framework can be applied in practice by assessing Russia's potential reactions to both planned and proposed enhancements. These assessments highlight the importance of clear analysis of Russian perceptions of NATO's intentions and commitment, domestic threats to the Russian regime, and the cost sensitivity of the Russian leadership.

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