

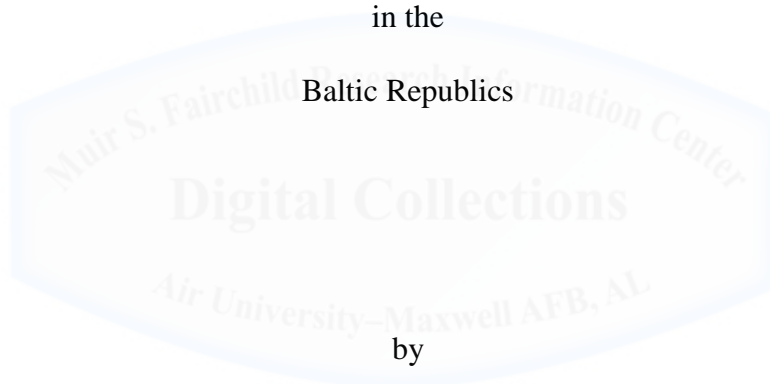
AIR WAR COLLEGE

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Deterring Russia's Revanchist Ambitions

in the

Baltic Republics



by

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

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## **Biography**

Colonel Sean McLay is an Air Force Senior Developmental Education student at the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama. He is a command pilot with three operational tours in the F-15C and two staff assignments for NORAD and NATO. Col McLay served as the Commander of the 98<sup>th</sup> Flying Training Squadron and Air Force Parachute Team. He was a distinguished graduate of both the U.S. Air Force Academy and Air Command and Staff College. Col McLay holds Master's degrees in Business Administration from the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, Operational Military Arts and Sciences from the Air Command and Staff College, and Strategic Studies from the Army War College.



## Abstract

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and swift annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 put the West on notice. To reassert the prestige lost since the Cold War's end, Russian President Vladimir Putin galvanized his political base with the promise of revanchism. The recent case of Ukraine is particularly alarming not only due to the forceful seizure of territory but also the "hybrid" warfighting techniques employed by Russian forces. The Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, former Soviet Republics with fledgling Western governments located on Russia's immediate border and, importantly, members of the NATO alliance, seem a logical future target for aggression. For the United States and NATO, the costs of failing to deter Russia's revanchist ambitions are clear; either initiating a costly campaign to liberate an Alliance member or allowing Russia to remake the post-Cold War order.

In the context of the recent conflict in Ukraine and the binding nature of NATO's collective security "guarantee," this paper will examine the steps the U.S. and NATO can reasonably take to deter Russia's revanchist ambitions in the Baltic republics, particularly from the threat of hybrid warfare. It will begin by providing a brief history of the Baltic Republics and the threat posed by Russia and hybrid warfare. Next, this paper will explore the strategic interests of the main protagonists and consider the requirements for an effective deterrent strategy. Finally, it will examine various *ways* and *means* across the various instruments of power that might be applied to deter Russian aggression in the Baltics, especially from the threat of hybrid warfare. In the final analysis, it is only through resolute action in implementing policy recommendations that encompass all instruments of power that the U.S. and NATO will be able to effectively deter Russian aggression and achieve their strategic interests in the region.

## Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and swift annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 put the West on notice.<sup>1</sup> To reassert the prestige lost since the Cold War's end – best exemplified through the forceful reclamation of former Soviet territories – Russian President Vladimir Putin galvanized his political base with the promise of revanchism. In his 2015 testimony to the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, General Philip M. Breedlove, United States Air Force, the Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, issued the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) foreboding warning to Western decision makers: "Our top concern is a revanchist Russia."<sup>2</sup> The recent case of Ukraine is particularly alarming not only due to the forceful seizure of territory but also the hybrid warfighting techniques employed by Russian forces, which included "a wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures employed in a highly integrated design" to destabilize Kiev's pro-Western government and encourage separatists.<sup>3</sup> The Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, former Soviet Republics with fledgling Western governments located on Russia's immediate border and, importantly, members of the NATO alliance, seem a logical future target for aggression. For the U.S. and NATO, the costs of failing to deter Russia's revanchist ambitions are clear; either initiating a costly campaign to liberate an Alliance member or allowing Russia to remake the post-Cold War order.<sup>4</sup>

Only through a determined approach by the Alliance will Putin's revanchist aims be thwarted in the Baltics and elsewhere in Europe and NATO's enduring collective security guarantee preserved. In the context of the recent conflict in Ukraine and the binding nature of the NATO alliance, this paper will examine various *ways* and *means* across the various instruments

of power that might be applied to deter Russia's revanchist ambitions in the Baltic republics, particularly from the threat of hybrid warfare.<sup>5</sup>

## **Part I - Background**

### **History of the Baltic Republics and Russia**

Russia's bonds to the Baltics are a matter of proximity and history. Geography places Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania between Russia and the Baltic Sea, and due to this fact, these nations have come under varying degrees of influence from their much larger neighbor. Estonia and most of Latvia were annexed by Peter I (The Great) following Russia's victory over Sweden in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Lithuania came under Russian rule in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the partitioning of Poland between Russia, Prussia and Austria.<sup>7</sup> Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, under Tsar Alexander III, a policy of "Russification" was initiated which placed Russian governors at the heads of the Baltic republics and instituted Russian as the official language.<sup>8</sup> The Baltics gained their independence in 1919 in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution; however, the nations were again consumed as satellite republics of the Soviet Union at the end of World War II. This supported Joseph Stalin's defensive policy of maintaining a "buffer zone" of friendly territories in order to ensure the Soviet Union "would never again be invaded by a Western force."<sup>9</sup> Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian elite watched in dismay as these former republics moved away from Moscow's "sphere of influence" and instead adopted closer ties with the U.S. and Western Europe by gaining NATO membership in 2004. To the Russian government and much of its public, these humiliating political gestures showed "a callous [Western] disregard for Russian sensibilities."<sup>10</sup>

The Baltics' turbulent history led to their current dilemma; independent, newly westernized nations with a significant Russian diaspora, many still attached legally, culturally,

and linguistically to the “old” homeland. Ethnic Russians now account for almost 25% of Latvia’s and Estonia’s populations.<sup>11</sup> As will be shown later in this paper, disaffected minorities currently residing in the Baltic Republics are potential targets for Russian destabilization efforts.

### **The Rise of Revanchist Russia**

Russia’s invasion of Georgia in 2008 seemingly marked a dramatic turning point in the country’s post-Soviet behavior. No longer was Putin willing to watch as former constituent republics of the old Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) moved closer to the West. Undeterred by threats from the international community and under the mantle of “protecting” Russian citizens, Putin’s forces not only occupied the breakaway Georgian provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, but briefly held territory in Georgia proper until pro-Russian, separatist governments were established in the aforementioned provinces.<sup>12</sup> More recently, Putin has continued his revanchist policies in Ukraine as part of a broader vision of restoring Russia’s power and prestige, as well as holding Western influence at bay. Once again, this behavior was evident after the pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich fell in 2014 following a popular uprising aimed at achieving a less corrupt and more Western-oriented society.<sup>13</sup> Unwilling to accede to the loss of influence in a country with such strong geographic, historic, and economic links to Russia, and under the guise of protecting Russian citizens, Putin ordered his forces into Crimea; eventually annexing the territory outright. In the cases of both Georgia and Ukraine, the West was either unable or unwilling to respond with sufficient force to halt Russia’s aggression. Importantly, however, neither country was a member of NATO at the time of the attacks. Considering these events and the strategic importance of the Baltic republics as members of the NATO alliance, the U.S. and NATO must prepare to face a similar challenge.

## **The Challenge Posed by Hybrid Warfare**

Although hybrid warfare encompasses the elements of traditional warfare, Russia's use of it in Ukraine offers a disturbing new model that might be particularly relevant to the situation in the Baltic republics. Such tactics included employing (undeclared) special and conventional Russian forces alongside local separatists, using oil and gas supplies as political pressure points, and embarking upon a disinformation campaign meant to destabilize the state.<sup>14</sup> A great fear among the Baltic governments is that Putin "might spark an insurgency among the ethnic Russia population, but with deniable tactics – like propaganda, cyberwar and covert operatives – which might not obviously trigger the NATO treaty's collective self-defense provision."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, any actions undertaken by a Baltic government to suppress an insurgent movement among ethnic Russians might be cause for Russia to act militarily under the pretense of protecting its fellow "countrymen." Additionally, the hybrid threat is especially concerning to the people of the Baltics, who also worry not only about the sizable concentration of Russian conventional forces just outside their borders, but also the credibility of NATO's commitment to their defense. Due to its ambiguous nature, some skeptically view hybrid warfare as an "excuse by which Western governments can avoid decisive action against Russia," much as they did in Georgia and Ukraine.<sup>16</sup>

## **NATO Membership and Article 5**

Following independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the Baltic nations moved quickly to cement links with the U.S. and Western Europe through membership in NATO in 2004.<sup>17</sup> The U.S., in particular, led the push to secure early NATO membership for the Baltic republics. Despite a realization by Washington that such a move might antagonize a weakened Russia, the U.S. wanted to secure democratic and economic reforms in the post-Soviet space.<sup>18</sup>



In contrast with states such as Georgia and Ukraine that were never seriously afforded the opportunity for NATO membership, the Baltic republics are technically protected by NATO's Article 5 security guarantee. This section of the Alliance's founding text states: "*The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them...shall be considered an attack against them all.*"<sup>19</sup> Thus, in theory, if Russia were to initiate military aggression against the Baltic states, NATO would be obliged to come to their defense. Unfortunately, due to intentionally vague language in the Alliance's charter, which also requires the unanimous agreement of all members to declare an "armed attack," uncertainty remains about NATO's commitment to defend its Eastern-most members.<sup>20</sup>

## **Part II - Strategic Interests**

A viable strategy to prevent Russian revanchism demands consideration of Russian, NATO, and U.S. interests. While the interests of the Baltic nations are not assumed to be identical, in the case of the existential threat posed by Russia, continued independence would appear to be the preeminent objective.

### **Russia**

Considering Russia's recent exploits in Ukraine, which greatly improved Putin's standing domestically, and the opportunity to challenge the NATO alliance, it is possible the Baltic nations might be Russia's next target for aggression.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, Russia's main interest in the Baltic nations appears to be rooted in reviving nationalist pride and countering the humiliation of witnessing former republics join Russia's main rival for regional influence, NATO.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Putin and Russian elites view the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 as "the greatest catastrophe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" and a cause for continuing embarrassment. This sentiment is evident in Russia's 2015 National Security Strategy which identifies the expansion of NATO as

a “direct threat” to the nation’s security.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, not only would initiating “hybrid” warfare undermine the Western democratic governments of the Baltic republics, it would also be an indirect (and potentially lethal) challenge to the NATO alliance. Western leaders must be especially alert to an increasingly unstable Russian regime intent on inventing external threats to maintain domestic power.

### **The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**

NATO’s overarching interest is maintaining the cohesion of the Alliance, both for the sake of its own survival and the collective security it affords to member states which have historically experienced great conflict with one another.<sup>24</sup> While NATO remains one of the most powerful military alliances in the world, its mandate to act is based on the collective will of 28 member states. Thus, if Russia was to attack either directly or indirectly, and NATO failed to achieve consensus to respond, the Alliance may collapse (or at best, its effectiveness would be called into question).<sup>25</sup> In terms of the Baltic scenario, NATO faces two major challenges: a conventional threat from Russian forces stationed just outside the Estonian borders, and another, more insidious threat, from Russia’s adaptive use of hybrid warfare.

With respect to the conventional scenario, Russia possesses a marked advantage in terms of military strength when compared against the militaries of the Baltic nations. For instance, Russia’s 6<sup>th</sup> Army of the Western Military District is comprised of several corps-sized formations and contains elements located a little over 100 miles from the Estonian border.<sup>26</sup> According to a recent study by the RAND Corporation, Russian forces from this district could easily overpower the Baltic militaries in a matter of days.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the report postulates “such a rapid defeat would leave NATO with a limited number of options, all bad”.<sup>28</sup> A conventional conflict with Russia places the Alliance in a difficult dilemma: either initiate a

costly and bloody “campaign of liberation” or concede defeat and allow Russia to remake the post-Cold War order.<sup>29</sup>

Hybrid warfare poses no less of a challenge to the Alliance. As demonstrated in Ukraine, attributing Russian influence to insurgent activity and determining when a “hybrid” attack has occurred is exceedingly difficult. In the initial stages of conflict, any delay by the Alliance in responding to ambiguous actions can dramatically increase the military problem. Additionally, strong disincentives for any military action against Russia exist amongst NATO’s member countries. According to the Pew Research Center, an overwhelming majority of NATO’s publics “are reluctant to live up to the promise of Article 5.”<sup>30</sup> When attacked, the Alliance has proven efficacious in the past, such as in the case of authorizing Article 5 intervention outside Europe’s borders to combat the threat of terrorism in Afghanistan. The conventional invasion notwithstanding, the question remains, will the NATO Alliance respond in a credible manner to an amorphous threat posed by hybrid warfare?

### **The United States**

America’s interests in Eastern Europe (including the Baltic republics) are inextricably tied to those of NATO as a whole. As the primary architect of the Alliance, the U.S. has championed NATO, even after its primary *raison d’être* – countering Soviet Communist expansionism – no longer existed. In the past two decades, successive U.S. administrations have viewed NATO expansion as a preferred policy tool for promoting “democracy and market economies” of countries formerly under Soviet influence.<sup>31</sup> President Bill Clinton led diplomatic efforts to bring the Baltic republics to the forefront of NATO’s second round of expansion in 2004.<sup>32</sup> Since that time, prominent U.S. leaders and academics alike have criticized this expansion into former Soviet republics as a reckless “political act, not a carefully considered

military commitment” which ignored Russia’s vital interests.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, these critics contend Putin’s actions in Georgia and Ukraine should not have come as a surprise because Russian leaders since the mid-1990s have “made it clear that they would not stand by while their strategically important neighbor turned into a Western bastion.”<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, as reaffirmed in the 2015 U.S. National Security Strategy, “the security of...U.S. allies and partners” continues to be at the pinnacle of security interests of U.S.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, America faces an unenviable dilemma when considering the situation in the Baltic republics. The cost of either action or inaction could be equally high, either in terms of a possible military confrontation with a nation possessing a formidable military or the dissolution of the NATO alliance, which has provided Europe a high degree of stability and security since its inception in 1949.

### **Part III - Requirements for an Effective Deterrent Strategy**

Deterrence in the military sense is “the threat of force intended to convince a potential aggressor not to undertake a particular action because the costs will be either unacceptable or the probability of success extremely low.”<sup>36</sup> Thomas Schelling, one of the foremost pioneers of deterrence theory, established three criteria that are necessary for effective deterrence: 1) the likely deterrent action must be *credible*; 2) the one doing the deterring must be *capable*; and, 3) the deterrent threat needs to be properly *communicated*.<sup>37</sup> Underlying Schelling’s criteria is an important assumption that the object of deterrence must be capable of *rationality* considering the consequences stemming from the threatened use of force.<sup>38</sup> Russia today, much like the Soviet Union in the past, has shown through words and deeds that while it may not always follow the Westphalian diplomatic rules, it is still sensitive to the “logic of force.”<sup>39</sup> Applying this to the problem of deterring Russian aggression in the Baltics, requires that any actions taken by the

U.S. and NATO must contain a credible and communicated threat of force emanating from capable armed forces and backed by sustained political leadership.

#### **Part IV – Policy Options for Deterring Russian Aggression in the Baltic Republics**

Having considered the relevant historical background, strategic interests, and the elements of credible deterrence, this essay will explore various *ways* and *means* across the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments of power that might be applied as part of an effective strategy to deter Russian aggression in the Baltic republics.

##### **Diplomatic**

The use of diplomatic instruments of power is important for communicating the intent of actions, both military and otherwise, as well as the resolve to act. The protagonists upon whom U.S. diplomacy is most critical are: Russia, the Baltics, and NATO.

First, Russia, as the predominant threat, must receive the thrust of diplomatic efforts. Effective deterrence is contingent upon a clear communication of intent to a specific audience.<sup>40</sup> Thus, diplomatically, the U.S. should unambiguously communicate that, unlike the cases of Ukraine and Georgia, it will lead the NATO alliance to act in a timely and forceful manner to defend one of its members. The U.S. must make clear to Putin's regime that the sovereignty of the Baltic nations are inextricably tied to the cohesion of the NATO Alliance and therefore, a critical national interest. In this regard, demarcation lines upon which NATO is prepared to act to counter aggression must be well considered and communicated. Undoubtedly, clear diplomatic communication prior to a crisis, especially regarding NATO's willingness to act in the event that positive Russian involvement is identified, is critical for avoiding misunderstanding and unnecessary military escalation.

Second, the U.S. must also apply its diplomatic efforts to the Baltic republics in order to facilitate internal reforms that will better insulate the nations from hybrid warfare. An area where they might be particularly vulnerable is the perceived treatment of ethnic Russians, particularly in Estonia and Latvia. According to credible reports, internal relations between Baltic governments and their Russian minorities have shown few signs of improvement in the past years.<sup>41</sup> There has also been a notable lack of progress addressing ethnic grievances. Tellingly, after the Baltic States gained their independence, some ethnic Russian residents were never granted “full citizenship”.<sup>42</sup> This could become a point of exploitation, especially considering Russia’s use of ethnic Russians or Russo-phone Ukrainians living in the Donbass region of Ukraine.<sup>43</sup> In light of the hybrid warfighting tactics seen in Ukraine, the U.S. should encourage Baltic governments to take positive steps to address the perceived civic inequities of their Russian populace in order to lessen the vulnerability to exploitation at a later date.

Lastly, the U.S. should apply its full diplomatic might towards encouraging the Alliance’s decision making body – the North Atlantic Council (NAC) – to pre-determine *indications* and *warnings* upon which the Alliance is prepared to act.<sup>44</sup> When such events become apparent, the NAC must decide whether to act or accept the risk from inaction.<sup>45</sup> For example, a predetermined trigger might come in the form of positive identification of a Russian conventional military presence in the Baltic republics. Thus, the implementation of pre-decided intervention points may assist in preventing costly delays in action in the event Russian aggression is identified. Any postponements in decision-making could create an infinitely more difficult military challenge of forcibly removing Russian forces from Baltic territories; a far less appealing and feasible measure than deterrence.

## **Informational**

A critical part of any deterrent strategy involves an informational program that synchronizes and communicates concurrent diplomatic, economic and military efforts.

At the strategic level, the U.S. and NATO must communicate their commitment to the Baltic republics. Historically, America's failure to clearly make known its regional interests has resulted in allowing aggressive actions by regimes not expecting a U.S. reaction. This was evident when Iraq attacked Kuwait, precipitating the 1991 Gulf War. In this instance, a failure of the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, to unambiguously communicate America's interest in preserving Kuwait's sovereignty likely provided the opening for Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussein to invade Kuwait.<sup>46</sup> As a result of faulty strategic messaging and a failure to clearly convey intent, America was forced to deal with the more difficult diplomatic and military challenge of building an international coalition and forcibly ejecting Iraq's forces from Kuwait. As this example illustrates, U.S. and NATO leaders must clearly convey to Russia's leaders, perhaps in the form of a NAC resolution, the willingness of the alliance to act resolutely in the defense of its Baltic members. Next, strategic messaging is critical within the Alliance to shore up support for actions against perceived threats. Solidarity in the form of unified messaging, particularly on the part of NATO's most powerful member-states, would facilitate the support of the smaller, less threatened nations and prevent costly delays. Finally, due to America's inherent leadership role in the Alliance, strategic communications by the U.S. President is critical to gain international support for deterrent actions and to convey the costs – in both human and financial capital – of failing to deter Russian aggression in the Baltics.

At the operational level, the U.S. and NATO must be prepared to counter an intense campaign of information operations in the event of hybrid war.<sup>47</sup> As evidenced by NATO's

participation in Afghanistan, its current communications structure appears both overly hierarchical and ill-suited to respond to extremely dynamic events. As such, it must develop a more responsive system of strategic communications. As Russia demonstrated during its invasion of Ukraine, any counter-information campaign must defeat enemy propaganda on the social and traditional media platforms to defuel separatist sentiment and quiet civil unrest. Considering the Baltic scenario, completely annexing the Baltic States would likely prove too costly and dangerous for Russia, because it would trigger an Article 5 response.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, a more probable scenario of Russian intervention in the Baltics is annexing the Eastern portions of the states where Russian ethnicity is near 50% and more susceptible to a hybrid “pull-off,” similar to that seen in Eastern Ukraine. To defend against this possibility, the U.S. and NATO must smartly leverage the informational realm, consisting of both traditional and social media, to enhance the effectiveness of its other instruments of power. Prior to the start of hostilities, the Alliance must design a more responsive communications architecture to counter damaging disinformation inherent in hybrid warfare.<sup>49</sup> The Alliance’s information strategy should empower commanders at all levels, not just the strategic, to be active participants in the Alliance’s information strategy and assist in countering the damaging effects of Russia’s hybrid tactics in the information realm.

## **Military**

The threat of NATO military power is critical to deter Russian aggression in the Baltics. In the past, Putin has displayed a proclivity to ignore diplomatic messaging unless it either aligns with his interests or is substantiated with a credible threat of military force.<sup>50</sup> This has been most evident in the recent failures of Western governments to deter Russian aggression in both Georgia and Ukraine.



When contemplating the available military options for deterring Russian aggression, the natural limits and risks of military deterrence must be thoroughly assessed. First, due to geopolitical realities that existed during the Cold War, few of NATO's current air bases or land forces are well-positioned to defend Eastern Europe. While it is unlikely NATO would forward deploy forces on a sufficient scale to repel a large scale Russian invasion, it would still be possible to place enough friendly forces in the Baltic region to demonstrate credible U.S. and NATO interest and raise the potential costs of Russian aggression.

Next, when considering military options involving Russia, the risk of attempting to deter a nation with advanced nuclear weapons must be considered. Currently, Russian military doctrine advocates the use of nuclear weapons (in some instances) as means of "de-escalating" a conflict once war is initiated.<sup>51</sup> According to this logic, since Russia's interests in the Baltic republics are implicitly greater than those of the West (due to historic, geographic and cultural reasons), the threatened use of nuclear weapons would deter Western nations from military intervention. Thus, as these limits and risks make clear, deterring Russian aggression before hostilities occurs is vitally important to preventing great expenditure of national blood and treasure.

To remedy these problems, there are several near-term military options that are available to U.S. and NATO leaders. First, while a permanent stationing of forces in the Baltic republics would be ideal considering the current threat, a sufficient military presence could still be established through the use of rotational forces.<sup>52</sup> Toward this end, NATO should establish a standing joint force in the Baltic republics of sufficient size and strength to cause Russia's leaders to take a serious pause when considering the costs and risks of a "snatch and grab" invasion. In essence, these forces would act as a "trip wire" that would prevent Russia from

taking territory in the Baltics without first engaging U.S. or other Western (non-Baltic) militaries, thereby raising their costs and risks of aggression. Second, to further demonstrate the Alliance's commitment to the region, NATO should invest in the infrastructure which enables the rapid insertion of forces that are otherwise kept nearby and outside of direct assault. Third, the U.S. should contribute assets such as Close Air Support (CAS) aircraft and Air Defense assets to the Baltic States, which would have a strong deterrent effect, demonstrate U.S. commitment to the region, and be readily available if military hostilities were initiated. Finally, the U.S. should expand its efforts to strengthen bilateral partnerships with the Baltic militaries to increase its capabilities and ability to integrate equipment into the NATO structure.<sup>53</sup> The benefits of a closer partnership would largely be in pre-integrating U.S., NATO, and Baltic nations command structures in the event of hostilities. Since it is unlikely any of the military options could prevent a large scale invasion of the Baltic region by Russian forces (if Moscow determined that was their only option), forward deploying NATO troops, investing in Baltic military infrastructure, and further integrating the Baltic militaries into existing U.S. and NATO military structures would significantly increase the costs of aggression and provide a credible deterrent.

### **Economic**

Following Moscow's Ukrainian intervention in 2014, Russia's economy was significantly impacted as the result of stringent economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. and the E.U. combined with sharply declining oil-prices since mid-2014.<sup>54</sup> As a result, there is an opportunity for increased economic leverage on Russia by the U.S. For instance, in exchange for non-aggression in the Baltics, America could offer assistance in settling long standing economic disputes between Russia and the Baltic republics over areas such as access to the Baltic Sea or

claims to the energy reserves contained therein. Conversely, if economic “carrots” are ineffective, the U.S. should be prepared to exercise available “sticks” by further tightening existing sanctions. In addition to further tightening of existing economic sanctions, America should consider expanding the coalition of nations willing to stand up to the threat of Russian revanchism, especially those with close economic ties that could be induced through favorable “off-set” agreements. Fortunately, unlike Ukraine and Georgia, the Baltic republics have become less susceptible to Russian economic leverage during the past decade through greater integration into Europe’s economic system and increased energy independence.<sup>55</sup>

In addition, the U.S. could choose to side with (or against) Russia in international disputes outside the Baltic region. For instance, the U.S. could put its diplomatic and economic weight towards a favorable resolution for Russia in its disputes with Japan in the East China Sea or with Canada and Norway in the Arctic region. Either of these actions could offer favorable inducements for Russia to avoid antagonizing the situation in the Baltic region further, and thereby improve stability.

Finally, in fiscal year 2016, the U.S. government is projected to provide the Baltic republics approximately \$100 million dollars as part of the European Response Initiative (ERI) for building partner defense capacity.<sup>56</sup> In light of the hybrid threats these nations face, the U.S. should make its economic assistance targeted and conditional on actions that minimize the Baltic states’ vulnerabilities. For instance, Baltic government should be encouraged to positively address the causes of perceived civic inequities of the Russian minority population and increase investment in and modernization of their militaries. Additionally, the U.S. President should be prepared to make the case to Congress about the necessity of strengthening America’s partnerships with the Baltic governments in order to deter the threat of Russian aggression. He

should make clear that if deterrence fails the ultimate cost to the U.S. and its allies will be much greater.

## **Part V - Recommendations**

By implementing the aforementioned diplomatic, military, economic and informational instruments of power in a timely and coordinated manner, the U.S. and NATO can show a credible and communicated capability to deter Russian aggression, and minimize their vulnerabilities to hybrid warfare.

### **Diplomatic**

- The U.S. and NATO should make diplomatically clear that they will act in a timely and forceful manner if the Baltic republics are threatened.
- The U.S. should explore areas of “shared” interests with Russia.
- The U.S. should mediate other extra-regional disputes with Russia.
- The U.S. should encourage the NAC to pre-determine *indications* and *warnings* in the event of an Article 5 declaration or any hybrid military threat to the region.

### **Informational**

- At the strategic level, the U.S. and NATO should clearly communicate their commitment to use all instruments of power to deter Russia from aggressive action in the Baltics.
- At the operational level, the U.S. and NATO should create a more responsive architecture for theater-level communications.

### **Militarily**

- NATO should establish a “standing” joint force in the Baltic republics.
- NATO should invest in the infrastructure which enables the rapid insertion of forces.

- The U.S. should contribute assets such as CAS aircraft and Air Defense assets to increase the Alliance's deterrent capabilities.
- The U.S. should establish a close partnership with the Baltic militaries in order to increase military synergies that could be employed both inside and outside the NATO.

### **Economic**

- The U.S. could offer assistance in settling long standing economic disputes between Russia and the Baltic republics.
- The U.S. should prepare to tighten existing economic sanctions on Russia.
- The U.S. should consider expanding the coalition of nations willing to stand up to the threat of Russian revanchism.
- The U.S. could bargain to side with (or against) Russia in international disputes outside the Baltic region.
- The U.S. should increase economic assistance to the Baltic governments contingent upon actions that will minimize the vulnerabilities of hybrid warfare.

### **Conclusion**

In the final analysis, the costs of failing to deter Russia's revanchist ambitions are clear; either initiating a costly campaign to liberate an Alliance member or shattering NATO's collective security "guarantee" and allowing Russia to remake the post-Cold War order. Therefore, it is in the interests of both the U.S. and NATO to act *now* while the strategic situation favors deterrence. Due to the potential for fractured opinions inside NATO, U.S. leaders must encourage member nations to act with one voice and against threats to the Alliance and the Western values it represents. By following the aforementioned recommendations, the U.S. and NATO can show a credible and communicated capability to deter Russian threats by employing

ways and means across the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic realms to minimize the vulnerability of the Baltic republics to the threat of hybrid warfare. Only through a determined approach by the Alliance will Putin's revanchist aims be thwarted in the Baltics and elsewhere in Europe and NATO's enduring collective security guarantee preserved.

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<sup>1</sup> Crimea's incorporation into the Russian Republic was declared by Russian President Vladimir Putin on 18 Mar 2014. This maneuver was not recognized by most of the international community. William Englund, "Kremlin says Crimea is now officially part of Russia after Treaty Signing", The Washington Post (18 March 2014).

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/russias-putin-prepares-to-annex-crimea/2014/03/18/933183b2-654e-45ce-920e-4d18c0ffec73\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/russias-putin-prepares-to-annex-crimea/2014/03/18/933183b2-654e-45ce-920e-4d18c0ffec73_story.html)

<sup>2</sup> General Philip M. Breedlove, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, in testimony to the US Senate Armed Services Committee on 30 April 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Wales Summit Declaration, 05 September 2014, referencing the "hybrid threat".  
[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm)

<sup>4</sup> John Vandiver, "Russia defeats NATO in Baltic War Game", The Stars and Stripes (04 February 2016). <http://www.stripes.com/news/europe/report-russia-defeats-nato-in-baltic-war-game-1.392103>

<sup>5</sup> The strategic interests of the U.S. and NATO in the Baltic region will be discussed at length in Part II of this paper.

<sup>6</sup> Mark J. Conversino, Professor, School of Advanced Aerospace Studies College, Maxwell AFB Alabama. Interview on 30 September 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Andres Kasekamp. *A History of the Baltic States*, (NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 84.

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