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Reset

Russia vs NATO: Baltic States Testing Ground

Brook C. Sweitzer

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Abstract

Russia vs NATO: Baltic States Testing Ground

This paper considers the Russian invasion threat and possible annexation of the Baltic States, or a piece thereof, to restore Russian power to that of the former Soviet Union, to seek revenge for what it feels is humiliation by NATO, and to dismantle NATO permanently. Since the end of the Cold War Russia has faced NATO encroachment, professionalized its military and taken advantage of opportunities to expand its influence. Baltics' leadership fear they might be Russia's next target and their small militaries depend on NATO membership to deter an attack. Populist statements and post-Cold War attitudes in the United States and Europe undermine NATO's credibility, and none of the NATO countries is well prepared to combat a hybrid attack. Meanwhile, Russia is already building a reason to invade the Baltics and will choose a low-risk opportunity using unconventional means to achieve its objectives. This paper argues for a better regional strategy in which the Baltics and NATO can best posture themselves amidst these Russian threats.

INTRODUCTION

Russia intends to demolish the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and is shaping the environment for an opportunity to invade the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) in order to test NATO's resolve. In 2014 Russia annexed Crimea, Ukraine using hybrid warfare and is likely to use this style in the Baltics unless effectively deterred.¹ Russia's history of undermining NATO since the turn of the century includes recent divide-and-conquer examples. Furthermore, the Baltics are a future Russian target due to their geography, history with Russia, and presence of ethnic Russians, the protection of whom was used as justification for the 2014 Crimean annexation.² In recent years, Russia cyberattacked the Baltics and implemented a propaganda campaign to foment dissent from within the Baltic states. Russia's information warfare efforts have contributed to secessionist and populist movements in Europe and the United States, undermining NATO's credibility and opening a lower-risk opportunity for Russia to invade the Baltics. NATO's response to such attacks, or lack thereof, will have permanent ramifications on the global order. In other words, the Baltic States are a potential testing ground of NATO's relevance. NATO is not prepared to deal with the Russian threat to the Baltic states and must heed three assertions: first, Russia wants to fracture NATO and is doing so non-kinetically; second, NATO is vulnerable to a Russian invasion of the Baltics; third, NATO must pursue better options to deter and, if necessary, to collectively defend against Russian aggression in the Baltics.

¹ Shay Shabtai, "The War After Next is Here — What Does the Elephant Look Like," *Defense & Security Analysis* 32, no. 4 (2016): 316; In this paper, "Hybrid Warfare" in this paper will be defined as it is by Shabtai: "Operational approach dealing with the way to jointly activate different organizations (conventional militaries, militias, covert organizations, terror organizations, mass protest movements) to achieve a strategic goal with the fewest negative consequences."; Michael Kofman and Matthew Rojansky, "A Closer Look at Russia's 'Hybrid War,'" Wilson Center *Kennan Cable*, no. 7 (April 2015). <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/7-KENNAN%20CABLE-ROJANSKY%20KOFMAN.pdf>; As a counterpoint to Shabtai's definition, Kofman and Rojansky assert that the term "hybrid war" is unhelpful and defer to Russia's doctrinal description of its style: "In Russia's 2010 Military Doctrine, modern warfare is described as entailing 'the integrated utilization of military force and forces and resources of a nonmilitary character.'"

² Eve Conant, "Ethnic Russians: Pretext for Putin's Ukraine Invasion?" *National Geographic*, May 02, 2014. <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/05/140502-russia-putin-ukraine-geography-crimea-language/>.

RUSSIA WANTS TO DESTROY NATO

“Napoleon once declared that if he had to make war, he would prefer to make it against a coalition.”³

Russia wants to destroy NATO.⁴ The new U.S. National Defense Strategy explicitly states that Russia wants “to shatter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization,” consistent with a statement by Secretary of Defense Mattis that Russian President Vladimir Putin is “trying to break [NATO].”⁵ For his part, Putin said in 2005 that “the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century,” and in 2016 he insinuated that NATO has outlived its usefulness and needs to be thrown in the ash heap of history.⁶ Putin’s stance is not without merit as Russia fears further encroachment of Western culture, detests NATO’s addition of Former Soviet Union (FSU) states on Russia’s borders, and seeks a return to global relevance by avenging what its leadership feels was an intentional effort by NATO to humiliate Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union.⁷ Russia’s ambitions require a

³ Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984.

⁴ John Grady, “Mattis Puts Russia On Top of His Threat List, Defends NATO,” *USNI News*, Jan 12, 2017. <https://news.usni.org/2017/01/12/mattis-puts-russia-top-threat-list-defends-nato>; John Grady, “EUCOM Nominee Scaparrotti: Putin ‘Trying to Break Up NATO,’” *USNI News*, Apr 21, 2016. <https://news.usni.org/2016/04/21/eucom-nominee-scaparrotti-putin-trying-to-break-up-nato>; Amy Wang, “‘There’s a War coming,’ Top Marine Corps General Tells U.S. Troops,” *Stars and Stripes*, Dec 23, 2017. <https://www.stripes.com/news/europe/there-s-a-war-coming-top-marine-corps-general-tells-us-troops-1.503853>; Bill Powell, “Inside Putin’s Campaign to Destroy U.S. Democracy,” *Newsweek*, May 18, 2017. <http://www.newsweek.com/2017/05/26/inside-putin-campaign-destroy-us-democracy-610401.html>.

⁵ National Defense Strategy, “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America,” Jan 2018. <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>; United States Senate, “Confirmation Hearing on the Expected Nomination of Mr. James N. Mattis to be Secretary of Defense,” Committee on Armed Services, Jan 13, 2017. https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/17-03_01-12-17.pdf.

⁶ Vladimir Putin, “Annual State of the Nation Address,” *BBC Monitoring* translated excerpts, website updated Apr 25, 2005. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4481455.stm>; Oleg Odnokolenko, “Vladimir Putin Proposes Eliminating NATO,” *Current Digest of the Russian Press* 68, no. 24 (Jun 13, 2016): 17. <https://dlib-eastview-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/browse/doc/46886461>.

⁷ Lilia Shevtsova, “Humiliation as a Tool of Blackmail,” *The American Interest* (accessed at *Brookings*), Jun 02, 2015. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/humiliation-as-a-tool-of-blackmail/>.

breakdown of adversarial alliances and its desire for a NATO-less world is possible due to NATO's current state.

NATO's resolve has shown chinks in its armor since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which makes it vulnerable to Russian efforts to disable it. For example, while most European NATO members are confident of U.S. military support, they largely do not want to increase defense spending, other than countries bordering Russia, and are somewhat reticent on whether or not to defend their neighbors from Russia.⁸ This recent polling of allied citizens calls into doubt whether their countries will honor NATO's Article 5 agreement "that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against all of them."⁹ As NATO's newest post-Cold War members, the Baltic States are the most lucrative and easiest targets for Russia and their invasion would thoroughly test the alliance's will. The Baltics remain unconvinced, however, of NATO's willpower to militarily repel a Russian invasion. An invaded Baltic nation is sure to invoke Article 5, but NATO partners are not necessarily obligated to respond militarily. An ineffectual NATO response combined with the smallest of Russian gains would permanently neuter the alliance.

Compounding NATO's chinks are the lukewarm reassurances from the United States to honor Article 5. While the United States is central to Baltic States' and NATO's security and to containing Russia's goals to revert to a global power, the new U.S. National Security Strategy emphasizes "America first" and that the United States "expect[s] [allies] to shoulder a fair share of the burden of responsibility to protect against common threats."¹⁰ Further

⁸ Robin Emmott, "U.S. Would Defend NATO Despite Trump's Criticism, Europeans Believe: Study," *Reuters* (online), May 23, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-nato-survey/u-s-would-defend-nato-despite-trumps-criticism-europeans-believe-study-idUSKBN18J21J>; Danielle Cuddington, "Support for NATO is Widespread Among Member Nations," *Pew Research Center*, Jul 06, 2016. www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/06/support-for-nato-is-widespread-among-member-nations/.

⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "The North Atlantic Treaty," NATO (website), Apr 04, 1949. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm.

¹⁰ Josh Rogin, "The United States Must Join Europe to Resist Russia's Meddling," *Washington Post*, Jan 02, 2017. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/the-united-states-must-join-europe-to-resist->

hollowing the U.S. support to NATO is President Trump's less than full-throated endorsement to authorize support for allies, suggesting aid only if they "fulfilled their obligations to us."¹¹ Despite reassurances in the past year from Trump and Mattis that the United States will support NATO allies unconditionally, the change in U.S. tone still lingers and European defense spending still lags. These mixed messages of support undercut NATO's credibility and raise concern for allies. While NATO and the United States work through their identity crises, Russia has professionalized its military and pressured its Baltic periphery.

The Baltics fear they are Russia's next target and have plenty of reasons to worry. In the aftermath of its Crimean annexation, Russia has demonstrated a "malign influence and military aggression" toward its neighbors.¹² In one particularly aggressive act, Russia imposed a devastating cyberattack on Estonia as retribution for moving a Soviet statue.¹³ Russia's methods of imposing itself on its neighbors span multiple domains, highlighted by "over fifty instances of Russian manipulation of energy supplies for political purposes," by 2004.¹⁴ These provocations have not gone unnoticed by the new Trump Administration

russias-meddling/2017/01/01/e9964cac-ceb1-11e6-a87f-b917067331bb_story.html?utm_term=.488969b7422e; The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Dec 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

¹¹ David E. Sanger and Maggie Haberman, "Donald Trump Sets Conditions for Defending NATO Allies Against Attack," *The New York Times*, Jul 20, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/21/us/politics/donald-trump-issues.html>; Uri Friedman, "What if Russia Invaded the Baltics—and Donald Trump Was President?" *The Atlantic*, Jul 27, 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/07/russia-nato-trump-shirreff/492938/>; Hal Brands, "The Unexceptional Superpower: American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump," *Survival* (2017), 59:6, 7-40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2017.1399722>.

¹² Curtis M. Scaparrotti, "EUCOM 2017 Posture Statement," Statement to Senate Committee on Armed Services, Mar 23, 2017. <http://www.eucom.mil/mission/eucom-2017-posture-statement>; Lianna Brinded, "A Holiday Spike in Russian Vessels Near UK Waters," *Defense One* (online), Dec 28, 2017. <http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2017/12/russia-navy-UK-waters/144861/>.

¹³ Stephen Herzog, "Revisiting the Estonian Cyberattacks: Digital Threats and Multinational Responses," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 49-60.

<http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1105&context=jss>. Russia never admitted to the attacks, and European authorities never declared they had proof of Russian government's involvement, though most cybersecurity experts say it was Russia due to having a motive and the state-based capabilities to carry out an attack of this magnitude.

¹⁴ S. Frederick Starr and Svantee E. Cornell, "Tactics and Instruments of Putin's Grand Strategy," in *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and its Discontents*, ed. S. Frederick Starr and Svantee E. Cornell

which recognized Russia's prior invasions and threatening posture toward Europe.¹⁵ While the United States and the rest of NATO have increased their support to the Baltics, a better strategy is needed as Russia's aggression continues unabated. Of all the arrows in Russia's quiver, however, perhaps the most lethal is its information warfare campaign which is insidiously breaking NATO.

Evidence of Russia's meddling in European and American affairs is prolific and shows Russia's active measures to divide populations and alliances. Right before its initial invasion of Ukraine in 2014, Russia leaked an illegally recorded phone call between U.S. diplomats discussing strategies to promote Ukraine's pro-Western politicians.¹⁶ In a tit-for-tat move, the United States leaked a recorded call between Russian ambassadors in which they laughed at how Russia was dividing nations, one by one, starting with Ukraine, then "Catalonia and Venice, and also Scotland and Alaska."¹⁷ Since that call, Catalonia has voted for independence from Spain, the United Kingdom lobbied hard to keep Scotland from voting itself out of the monarchy, and Venice is as close as ever to claiming independence from the rest of Italy.¹⁸ Though these political divides cannot be solely attributed to one

(Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, 2014), 72.

<https://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/1409GrandStrategy.pdf>; Robert Larsson, *Russia's Energy Policy: Security Dimensions and Russia's Reliability as an Energy Supplier* (Stockholm: Swedish Defense Research Institute, Mar 2016), 262. <https://ntrl.ntis.gov/NTRL/dashboard/searchResults/titleDetail/PB2007106453.xhtml>; Ilya Zaslavskiy, "The Kremlin's Gas Games in Europe: Implications for Policy Makers," Atlantic Council (May 2017).

http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/The_Kremlin_Gas_Games_in_Europe_0524_RW.pdf.

¹⁵ Matthew Lee, "Trump's Security Paper Offers Stark Vision of Global Rivalry," *Associated Press*, Dec 14, 2017. <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2017/12/14/trumps-security-paper-offers-stark-vision-of-global-rivalry/>; The White House, *National Security Strategy*.

¹⁶ Zachary Treu, "Leaked U.S. Phone Call about Ukraine Draws Anger from Russia, EU," PBS (online), Feb 07, 2014. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/leaked-u-s-phone-call-ukraine-draws-anger-russia-eu>. Though Russia never admitted to leaking this phone call, U.S. Government officials point the blame directly at Russia.

¹⁷ Shaun Walker, "Russian Ambassadors: 'Next We'll Take Catalonia, Venice, Scotland, and Alaska,'" *The Guardian*, Apr 04, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/04/russian-ambassadors-catalonia-venice-scotland-alaska-annex-crimea>. The U.S. never admitted to leaking this phone call, though all indicators point to it.

¹⁸ Robin Emmott, "Spain Sees Russian Interference in Catalonia Separatist Vote," *Reuters*, Nov 13, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-politics-catalonia-russia/spain-sees-russian-interference-in-catalonia-separatist-vote-idUSKBN1DD20Y>; Nick Allen and Jack Maidment, "Russians 'Set up Shop' in Scotland to Force New Independence Vote," *The Telegraph*, Nov 11, 2017.

factor, Russia clearly finds and exploits fissures in NATO countries using information operations. The United States and its NATO allies remain stuck in a security mentality that fails to effectively address Russia's ongoing operations.¹⁹ Indeed, Russia's true offensive weapon is not planes or tanks, but rather information manipulation which is currently fracturing NATO.

A CLEVER RUSSIAN PLAN CAN DEFEAT NATO

*"It's impossible to know what the United States position is on any number of subjects ... We could go sleepwalking into a war."*²⁰

Russia will continue efforts to undermine NATO by operating in the Gray Zone until it determines the right time, place, and risk level to execute a coup de grâce military destruction of the alliance. Russia's opportune moment to invade the Baltics will be when the United States is preoccupied with other troubles or when NATO's willpower is too weak to defend its smaller partners. The United States has stepped up support to NATO, and the Baltics specifically, but is ill-prepared for a Russian attack, finding itself unsure of its obligations.²¹ Meanwhile, Russia continues corroding NATO and the United States and

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/01/russian-cyber-operatives-setting-shop-scotland-promote-independence/>; Damien Sharkov, "Moscow Opens Forum on Texan, Scottish, and Catalan Independence," *Newsweek*, Sep 24, 2016. <http://www.newsweek.com/moscow-opens-forum-texan-scottish-and-catalan-independence-501945>. Russia continues to meddle in separatist movements, keeping a constant pressure.

¹⁹ Russia is employing "Gray Zone" operations, a subset of their "hybrid warfare" in which Russian operations do not rise to the level of what its adversaries consider conventional conflict and at which they are unable to effectively address with their policies and/or instruments of national power; To highlight the U.S. mentality, a recent high-ranking guest lecturer to the prestigious Naval War College declared that "war is when troops are killed in combat." So long as NATO maintains that stance, Russia will continue moving toward its objectives by pressuring the alliance up to that point.

²⁰ Roger Cohen, "Trump's National Security Strategy Is a Farce," *The New York Times*, Dec 19, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/19/opinion/trump-national-security-strategy-tillerson-haley.html>. This quote was from an anonymous European ambassador, referring to U.S. strategy in 2017.

²¹ Mark Perry, "Inside the Pentagon's Fight Over Russia," Politico (blog), Nov 04, 2015, updated Jul 17, 2017. <https://www.politico.eu/article/inside-the-pentagons-fight-over-russia-us-eastern-europe/>; Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Lending support to Baltic States Fearing Russia," *New York Times*, Jan 01, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/01/us/politics/us-baltic-russia.html?_r=0; Sinan Ülgen, "NATO's Southern Strategy at Crossroads," *Carnegie Europe*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Dec 11, 2017. <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2017/12/07/nato-s-southern-strategy-at-crossroads-pub-74932>.

pressuring NATO's eastern flank. Perhaps the best moment for an invasion of the Baltics is when the United States is distracted by domestic upheaval or a large military conflict elsewhere, such as with North Korea or Iran. Another opportune time is during the Olympics, proven by Russia's attacks on Georgia and Ukraine which coincided with the 2008 Summer and 2014 Winter Olympics, respectively. As host to a well-run 2014 Games, Russia was at a peak in global goodwill, giving it extra latitude in employing military aggression. Though much of that goodwill is gone, the Olympics are a time in which most countries temporarily strive for higher levels of peace and cooperation, at least publicly, making that period more vulnerable to less-friendly actors. Determining the right time is critical to a successful Russian invasion, yet the Baltics' NATO affiliation presents different and more difficult challenges than Ukraine.

Russia's aggression towards Georgia and Ukraine must be compared and contrasted with the Baltic nations to better assess Russia's risks if it invades the Baltics. Ukraine, Georgia, and the Baltics are all former Soviet Republics that border or are, in Lithuania's case, near Russia. Ukraine (17.3%), Latvia (26.2%), and Estonia (24.8%) have significant ethnically Russian populations while Georgia (1.5%) and Lithuania (5.8%) have less so.²² Despite the former republics' proximity, history, and ethnic ties to Russia, there are several differences that make taking the Baltics a riskier proposition for Russia, so an invasion is not a foregone conclusion.²³ One key difference is that the Baltic nations are NATO members, while Ukraine and Georgia sought NATO membership at the time their conflict with Russia

²² Conant, "Ethnic Russians."

²³ Robert Person, "6 Reasons Not to Worry About Russia Invading the Baltics," *Washington Post*, Nov 12, 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/11/12/6-reasons-not-to-worry-about-russia-invading-the-baltics/?utm_term=.dae2b5f69fad.

arose, squashing any chance at membership due to the new border disputes.²⁴ The Baltics' established NATO membership is precisely why an invasion is risky for Russia and drives its efforts to quash NATO. Another major difference is that the Baltic countries are European Union members, fully assimilated into the European society and economy, whereas Ukraine and Georgia have been more greatly subject to Russia's influence since the Cold War ended. If Russia were to invade the Baltics, the risks would certainly be higher than Russia's adventurism in Ukraine due to NATO's Article 5, and the invaded populations would be more resistant to the foreign occupation due to their European assimilation. Russia needs a clever plan at the right place combined with an unreliable NATO to successfully invade and hold Baltic land.

In analyzing the Russian threat to the Baltic nations, another item must be considered — Russia's possible intentions to form land bridges between its motherland and its military bases abroad, in Crimea, Transnistria, and Kaliningrad. Ukraine's pro-Western and NATO-seeking president threatened to not renew Russia's leased naval base in Crimea just prior to Russia's annexation of Georgia, perhaps sending a message to Ukraine that Russia's military might is back.²⁵ In another area, Transnistria, a United Nations-unrecognized breakaway state from Moldova, houses approximately 1,500 Russian military troops and its population considers itself Russian. General Phillip Breedlove, the former Commander of Supreme Allied Command Europe, suggested Transnistria as a possible trigger point for World War III.²⁶ Putin added to the idea that a connecting operation could be a goal when he called Kiev,

²⁴ Luke Harding, "Bush Backs Ukraine and Georgia for NATO Membership," *The Guardian*, Apr 01, 2008. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/01/nato.georgia>; Kenneth Rapoza, "Ukraine's NATO Pipe Dream?" *Forbes*, Sep 19, 2017. <https://hurld.house.gov/media-center/in-the-news/ukraines-nato-pipe-dream>.

²⁵ Anne Garrels, "Russians Cling to Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula," *NPR Morning Edition*, Sep 12, 2008. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94545608>. Georgia was a more pressing concern to Russia at the time, but Ukraine undoubtedly received the message that its own NATO dreams and power to kick out the Russian military were slipping away.

²⁶ Paul D. Miller, "How WWII Could Begin in Latvia," *Foreign Policy*, Nov 16, 2016. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/11/16/how-world-war-iii-could-begin-in-latvia/>.

Ukraine the “mother of all Russian cities,” perhaps hinting at a future operation to connect mainland Russia to Transnistria, via Kiev, in the same way it connected its Crimean naval base to mainland Russia, via the Donbass region.²⁷ Similar to Crimea and Transnistria, Kaliningrad is also geographically separated from mainland Russia by only a short distance. While the Baltic nations have never suggested blocking Russia’s lines of communication with Kaliningrad, based on Russia’s Crimean land-grab and its suggested designs on Transnistria, a Russian military operation through the Baltics to connect with Kaliningrad is within the realm of the possible. Despite Russia’s clear military objectives in annexing Crimea and its perceived intentions to create land bridges elsewhere, Russia invaded Ukraine under the publicly stated reason of protecting ethnic Russians, a pretext they have been shaping in the Baltic countries.

In the Baltics, Russia continues strengthening its preferred invasion narrative: protecting ethnic Russians. Andris Razans, the Latvian Ambassador to the United States, stated that despite his country’s large ethnically Russian population, most are assimilated into Europe and do not desire a Latvian return to Russian control.²⁸ Studies back up Razans’ statements, showing that most pro-Russian sentiment among ethnically Russian Latvians resides within a narrow demographic of the elderly.²⁹ This small bloc was largely emplaced

²⁷ Matthew Schofield, “First Ukrainian Soldier Killed as Putin Calls Kiev ‘Mother of All Russian Cities,’” *McClatchy DC Bureau*, Mar 18, 2014. www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24765379.html.

²⁸ Andris Razans, Speech at BYU Kennedy Center Lectures, “Europe-- Opportunities and Challenges: The EU Presidency of Latvia.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4he3S-Vlcik>.

²⁹ Licia Cianetti and Ryo Nakai, “Critical Trust in European Institutions: The Case of the Russian-Speaking Minorities in Estonia and Latvia,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol 64, issue 5: 276-290. <http://www-tandfonline-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1080/10758216.2016.1237292?src=recsys>; Peter Dorrie, Matthew Luxmoore, Judah Grunstein and Frederick Deknatel, “Can Latvia Forge a Unified National Identity in the Shadow of Russia?” *World Politics Review* Podcast, Jan 06, 2017. <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/20852/can-latvia-forge-a-unified-national-identity-in-the-shadow-of-russia>; Anastassia Zabrodskaja, “What is My Country to Me? Identity Construction by Russian-Speakers in the Baltic Countries,” *Sociolinguistic Studies*; Galicia Vol 9, Iss 2/3 (2015): 217-241. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1725633689?pq-origsite=summon>; Martin Hirss, “Expert Views ‘True Scope of Russian Propaganda’ in Latvia,” *BBC Monitoring European*, Aug 05, 2016. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1809012881?accountid=322>. As a counterpoint, the opinions of ethnic Russians in the Baltics might not be quite as rosy as what Razans suggests. Other polls suggest that

in Latvia by the Soviet Union and desires a Russian return to Soviet power. Nevertheless, Russia has made concerted propaganda efforts to sow divide internally to the Baltic nations, focusing on the ethnic Russians who are not allowed to vote and those who have non-citizenship status.³⁰ Its desire to widen social fissures of its targets do not stop with ethnic Russians, however, as Russian influence penetrates Latvia's eastern region of Latgale, a diverse area of ethnic Latvians and ethnic Russians, many of whom speak a Latvian dialect.³¹ Additionally, "Moscow has obtained influence over several political parties, which can play crucial roles as kingmakers."³² To capture the magnitude of possible ramifications of Russia's campaign in Latgale and other areas of the Baltics, evidence shows that Russia employed psychological operations targeting similar societal divides in Ukraine prior to that invasion.³³ Russia's brand of information warfare will undoubtedly factor into its next invasion, no matter the location.

Russian media has been very effective in convincing ethnic Russians that the quality of life is higher in Russia than in Latvia, and that fascism is taking over Latvia even though they have not personally seen any examples.

³⁰ Alistair Scrutton and David Mardiste, "Wary of Divided Loyalties, a Baltic State Reaches Out to its Russians," *Reuters*, Feb 24, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-baltics-russia/wary-of-divided-loyalties-a-baltic-state-reaches-out-to-its-russians-idUSKBN1630W2>; Carol Williams, "Latvia, With a Large Minority of Russians, Worries About Putin's Goals," *LA Times*, May 02, 2015. www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-latvia-russia-next-20150502-story.html.

³¹ Andrew Higgins, "Latvian Region Has Distinct Identity, and Allure for Russia," *The New York Times*, May 20, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/21/world/europe/latvian-region-has-distinct-identity-and-allure-for-russia.html>.

³² Starr and Cornell, "Tactics," 68; Otto Ozols, "Russia-Friendly Latvian Parties seen Winning Majority in 2018," *BBC Monitoring European*, Aug 14, 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1928840350?accountid=322>.

³³ Valentina Pop, "NATO Colonel Sheds Light on Russia 'Psy-Ops,'" *euobserver*(online), Jan 22, 2015. <https://euobserver.com/foreign/127174>; Ellen Nakashima, "Inside a Russian Disinformation Campaign in Ukraine in 2014," *The Washington Post*, Dec 25, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/inside-a-russian-disinformation-campaign-in-ukraine-in-2014/2017/12/25/f55b0408-e71d-11e7-ab50-621fe0588340_story.html?utm_term=.6a32be74bdee. Matthew Rojansky, "Testimony Before U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. Policy Toward the Baltic States," U.S. Official News, Mar 23, 2017. <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA14/20170322/105756/HHRG-115-FA-14-Wstate-RojanskyM-20170322.pdf>. As a counterpoint, Rojansky says "For such efforts to maintain credibility, they must assiduously avoid the temptation to match propaganda with propaganda, which will damage the West's brand and betray the values for which the United States and NATO stand. While NATO has been wise to pay close attention to information warfare as a vulnerability, it should avoid exaggerating the threat or its own response."

Russia enjoys several geographic options to invade the Baltics. Considering Belarus a de facto Russian state, Russia's shortest distance to Kaliningrad is the stretch along the Polish and Lithuanian border called the Suwalki Gap.³⁴ An invasion and annexation of Estonia and Latvia, with their much higher ethnically Russian populations, however, are potentially a greater prize and an easier target, and would nearly envelop Lithuania, thereby dominating the trio of Baltic nations.³⁵ Any attack would likely include combat on the Baltic Sea, where Russia may not need to contend with either Finland or Sweden, neither of which are NATO members.³⁶ Other points of interest include the aforementioned Latvian region, which Russia is socially dividing from the rest of the country, or a small section of Estonia, called Narva which is in the extreme northeast of the Baltics and whose defense would pose a great disadvantage to NATO.³⁷ Russia's style of fighting has many tools at its disposal, such as control of energy to the Baltics, which Russia could turn off or manipulate for leverage.³⁸ Russia also poses a threat to NATO communications with its claimed ability to cut strategic ocean lines.³⁹ In any event, NATO can expect a Russian invasion to be confusing, fast, and

³⁴ Julian E. Barnes, "World News: NATO Tests Key Supply Lines," *Wall Street Journal*, Jun 21, 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1911486618?accountid=322>. NATO considers the Suwalki Gap a likely point for Russia to bridge to Kaliningrad. Not only is it a short distance, but is also along a border which could cause NATO coordination troubles when responding, and it would sever NATO Ground Lines of Communication from the three Baltic nations.

³⁵ In this scenario, Lithuania could conceivably have Russian forces at its borders with Belarus, Latvia, and Kaliningrad. Its only breathing room would be the short border it shares with Poland and a small coastline.

³⁶ Colum Hawken, "Q-Boats and Chaos: Hybrid War on the High Seas," *The Strategy Bridge* (blog), Dec 07, 2017. <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2017/12/7/q-boats-and-chaos-hybrid-war-on-the-high-seas>.

³⁷ Higgins, "Latvian Region"; Naomi O'Leary, "NERVOUS IN NARVA: A TOWN CAUGHT BETWEEN EAST AND WEST," *Irish Times*, Feb 11, 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1867066449?accountid=322>; Michael Carpenter, "Testimony to Senate Foreign Relations Committee, U.S. Policy Toward Russia," Jenna Lihits (Youtube channel), posted Jun 08, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQj05oCrcy8>. If Russia were to invade Narva, Russia would dominate the three operational factors of war (time, space, and force) over NATO. A compelling NATO response in the same location could have a relatively long delay and might not be possible.

³⁸ Kenneth Rapoza, "Clinton Stokes Fears of Russians Coming to the Baltics, When They're Actually Leaving," *Forbes*, Feb 07, 2016. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2016/02/07/hillary-clinton-stokes-the-baltics-fear-of-russia/#53ced9dc3352>.

³⁹ Saphora Smith, "Russia Could Cut Off Internet to NATO Countries, British Military Chief Warns," *NBC News* (online), Dec 17, 2017. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/russia-could-cut-internet-nato-countries-british-military-chief-warns-n830371>.

well-choreographed, with Russia knowing its next moves and counter-moves well ahead of a disoriented NATO.⁴⁰ While a Russian attack would take advantage of NATO's indecision, the scale of a Baltic invasion is not often discussed.

Russia's Baltic adventurism could be large or small. A large invasion could mean annexing an entire country or securing a strip of land between Russia and Kaliningrad. A small invasion would look, for example, like a Russian annexation of a very tiny piece of Estonian land with the main objective of testing, if not wrecking, NATO. Regardless of the scale of a Russian invasion, if not sufficiently repulsed by NATO, Russia will effectively end the credibility of the alliance and subject Europe to more Russian aggression. Annexing even a minuscule piece of Baltic territory against a clunky, confused NATO is a perfect opportunity for Russia to recover some of its lost Soviet glory.

A BETTER NATO PLAN CAN DETER A RUSSIAN INVASION

*"Putin will take over the Baltics like Hitler took over Germany – Democratically."*⁴¹

NATO and the Baltics, in particular, need an anti-hybrid warfare plan to avoid getting into a situation where its steadfastness is tested and perhaps permanently damaged.⁴² Several different types of deterrence and defense options might improve the existing strategy. For instance, NATO could threaten to exploit Russian military deaths if Russia invaded, an issue so sensitive to Russians that the government keeps classifies deaths at the highest levels.⁴³

⁴⁰ Starr and Cornell, "Tactics," 79. Russia's brand of hybrid warfare is elegant in that it integrates its instruments of national power in varying degrees of choreographed phases.

⁴¹ Ozols, "Latvian Parties."

⁴² Mark Galeotti, "Time to Think About 'Hybrid Defense,'" *War on the Rocks* (blog), Jul 30, 2015. <https://warontherocks.com/2015/07/time-to-think-about-hybrid-defense/>; Harlan Ullman, "NATO Needs a New Strategy," *Daily Times*, Feb 12, 2016. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/94561/nato-needs-a-new-strategy/>; Andrew Radin, "Hybrid Warfare in the Baltics: Threats and Potential Responses," RAND Corporation, 2017. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1577.html.

⁴³ Andrei A. Piontkovsky, "Endless Hybrid War: Why Vladimir Putin Simply Cannot Allow Ukraine to Succeed," Hudson Institute, Nov 06, 2016. <https://www.hudson.org/research/13002-endless-hybrid-war-why-vladimir-putin-simply-cannot-allow-ukraine-to-succeed>.

NATO could assert itself more forcefully in the Black Sea, where Russia is rebuilding its naval power and where the U.S. could present different military risks, complicating Russia's moves.⁴⁴ Additionally, defense strategist Harlan Ullman suggests a "porcupine defense" in which NATO rebukes Russian aggression by sharp, pointed military attacks.⁴⁵ This "porcupine defense" draws a more-restrictive line at which NATO will not tolerate Russian actions. The current undefined line is too lenient to prevent Russia from effectively operating in the gray zone. NATO's current warfare paradigm equates superior technology to a superior military and narrowly defines "war" as troops killed in combat, whereas Russia's approach is designed to confuse and slow NATO's response.⁴⁶ Non-military ideas should also be used to avoid Russian pressures.

The Baltics can take steps to remove themselves from Russia's influence. For example, Lithuania weaned itself of Russian-supplied gas and all three Baltic states will be on EU electricity by 2020.⁴⁷ The Baltics should strongly consider removing any obstacles to citizenship and voting from their ethnically Russian populations, to lessen the oft-stated grievances of Putin which he has used to invade other countries. Removing vulnerabilities from Russia's control not only strengthens Baltic resistance but also strengthens NATO's investment in the region as the Baltics are becoming more reliant on Europe. Besides shifting

⁴⁴ Harlan Ullman, "NATO Should Pivot to the Black Sea, End Russia's Free Ride," *Observer*, Sep 29, 2017. <http://observer.com/2017/09/to-squeeze-russia-nato-should-focus-on-black-sea-romania/>.

⁴⁵ Harlan Ullman, "NATO Needs a Strategic Pivot," Twitter (blog), Sep 23, 2017. <https://twitter.com/harlankullman/status/911579778746142720>; Harlan Ullman, "NATO Should Pivot to the Black Sea, End Russia's Free Ride," *Observer*, Sep 29, 2017. <http://observer.com/2017/09/to-squeeze-russia-nato-should-focus-on-black-sea-romania/>.

⁴⁶ Senior Military Officer, "Speech to Naval War College" Jan 2018.

⁴⁷ Andrius Sytas, "Baltic States to Link Power Grid to EU as Early as 2020, Says Lithuania." *Reuters*, Dec 07, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/baltics-energy-eu-russia/baltics-states-to-link-power-grid-to-eu-as-early-as-2020-says-lithuania-idUSL8N1O753A>; Charlie Rose, "Vladimir Putin, Pt. 2," Charlie Rose interview, Sep 29, 2015. <https://charlierose.com/videos/23191>. Charlie Rose discussed the Baltics with Putin and Putin was frustrated by the Baltics changing their energy plans because it would cost Russia billions of dollars. As a counterpoint to all the suggestions, NATO needs to consider Russia's reactions so as not to carelessly antagonize or escalate a situation.

Baltic reliance from Russia to NATO, the Baltics should also improve their own security self-reliance.

Other considerations, some already implemented independently by certain countries, must be implemented by the Baltics to train their citizens to be insurgents. The Baltics could prepare by using elements of Switzerland's plan, essentially preparing for a war after the war using "civilian resistance" measures such as making propaganda and using "unconventional military resistance operations" such as ad hoc guerrilla warfare tactics.⁴⁸ Latvians have formed unofficial paramilitary groups to shoulder the responsibility for fighting Russians, and the country has formalized a Youth Guard program for minors to receive military training.⁴⁹ For its part, Lithuania has created a war manual for its citizens to resist a Russian occupation.⁵⁰ Through such unconventional means, the Baltics will ready their citizens for a post-invasion resistance campaign, which has the added benefit of deterring an invasion as Russia might not be so eager to fight a stubborn insurgency. Aside from post-invasion preparations, unique ideas for arming the citizenry with pre-invasion weapons also exist.

The Baltics must consider all instruments of national power in order to stave off a Russian invasion and to fortify themselves against Russia's ongoing non-kinetic operations. They can take a page from Norway's playbook by applying a "whole of society" design, such as involving the "private sector" and stressing "media literacy."⁵¹ Latvia is executing a piece of that plan by "teaching critical thinking skills to inoculate citizens against misinformation"

⁴⁸ Jan Osburg, "Unconventional Options for the Defense of the Baltic States: The Swiss Approach," RAND Corporation, 2016.

https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE179/RAND_PE179.pdf.

⁴⁹ Siddhartha Mahanta, "These Baltic Militias Are Ready for War with Russia," *The Atlantic*, Nov 26, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2017/11/baltic-anti-russian-militia/545465/>.

⁵⁰ Nic Robertson, et al., "Lithuania Issues Manual on What to Do if Russia Invades," CNN (online), Oct 28, 2016. <https://www.cnn.com/2016/10/28/europe/lithuania-war-manual/index.html>.

⁵¹ Lauren Kinsey, "Norway has Successfully Resisted Russian Efforts," Twitter (blog), Jan 17, 2018. <https://twitter.com/LaurenMKinsey/status/953700086193819653>.

that Russia uses to “amplify divisions in society.”⁵² Other NATO countries are fighting information threats in unique ways, such as publishing examples of propaganda and hiring people called “cyber elves” to combat Russia’s internet trolls.⁵³ These seemingly simple and inexpensive ways to better inform citizens may very well have a greater strategic impact than any weaponry on the future of Baltic conflict with Russia. The Baltics can take their cognitive pursuits to another level by bringing national unity to the forefront with a resonating idea.

An inexpensive way for the Baltics to counter Russia’s military aggression and its powerful, socially divisive methods is to form a national narrative. The strongest histories resonate with people and penetrate national culture. China’s “Century of Humiliation” and “nine-dash line” are good examples of how a shared purpose can unify a nation. A possible Baltic motto is “Not One Square Centimeter.” The pride of national identity and sovereignty underlies this motto, the idea that no one, not even Russia, will take one square centimeter of Baltic real estate. The Baltics, credibly backed by the United States, command a strong voice against Russia and can implement this concept.⁵⁴ Anything from attire to posters to billboards to internet memes displaying a very small square, one square centimeter in size, and the words “NOT EVEN ONE” printed above it, is enough to symbolize the Baltic sentiment. This idea, were it to catch on with the public, could deter Russia from trying a small, NATO-testing annexation.

⁵² Reid Standish, “Russia’s Neighbors Respond to Putin’s ‘Hybrid War,’” *Foreign Policy*, Oct 12, 2017. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/10/12/russias-neighbors-respond-to-putins-hybrid-warlatvia-estonia-lithuania-finland/>.

⁵³ Dana Priest and Michael Birnbaum, “Europe has been Working to Expose Russian Meddling for Years,” *The Washington Post*, Jun 25, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/europe-has-been-working-to-expose-russian-meddling-for-years/2017/06/25/e42dcece-4a09-11e7-9669-250d0b15f83b_story.html.

⁵⁴ Jeremy Lamoreaux, “Acting Small in a Large State’s World: Russia and the Baltic States,” *European Security*, Jun 16, 2013. Vol 23, Iss 4, 2014: 565-585. <http://www.tandfonline-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1080/09662839.2014.948862?src=recsysL>. The Baltics have already shown the capability to literally lock arms in solidarity against Russia when they formed a two million person human chain in 1989 that stretched across the three capitals.

CONCLUSION

Russia poses a threat to the Baltics and using a hybrid invasion could test NATO's resolve. NATO's very survival depends on deterring and defending against the clear threat Russia poses to the stability of the allies' peoples and governments, particularly with its non-kinetic, insidious, modern information warfare campaign which is effectively dividing NATO countries. To credibly deter Russia, NATO needs to find its twenty-first-century identity to determine its willingness to fight for its neighbors. As NATO's level of participation in collective defense is the primary variable in when, how, where, and if Russia will invade a NATO country, NATO must aggressively pursue a better Baltic deterrence and defensive strategy to counter Russia's ongoing campaign. NATO should see this threat as more than an economic problem in which it can buy high-tech weaponry to outshoot Russia. Rather, Baltic-wide adoption of alternative counter-Russia practices, such as focusing education on critical thinking, weaning Baltic critical resources off Russia, implementing advanced cyberspace defenses across the Baltics, and training counter-Russian citizen-insurgents. One additional deterrent suggestion is for citizens to embrace a compelling, Baltic-unifying narrative. The above suggestions combined with a strong, credible NATO force will ensure the security of the Baltics and NATO by deterring Russia's designs.

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