

# RUSSIAN STRATEGY

EXPANSION, CRISIS AND CONFLICT



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

**Russian Strategy**  
***Expansion, Crisis and Conflict***

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## Foreword

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*Usually the most convincing way to look willing is to be willing.*

*Herman Kahn (1960)*

Short of war itself, the international political and strategic relations between Russia and the United States are about as bad as they can be. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the simultaneous conduct of two independent air campaigns over Syria could evolve all too suddenly into a war triggered by accident or by miscalculation.

There is little, if any, mystery about the broad political purpose fueling Vladimir Putin's conduct of international relations. Subtlety is not a characteristic of Russian statecraft; cunning and intended trickery, though, are another matter. Stated directly, Putin is striving to recover and restore that of which he is able from the late USSR. There is no ideological theme in his governance. Instead, there is an historically unremarkable striving after more power and influence. The challenge for the Western World, as demonstrated in this National Institute study in meticulous and troubling detail, is to decide where and when this latest episode in Russian expansionism will be stopped. What we do know, for certain, is that it must and will be halted. It is more likely than not that Putin himself does not have entirely fixed political-strategic objectives. His behavior of recent years has given a credible impression of opportunistic adaptability. In other words, he will take what he is able, where he can, and when he can. However, there is ample evidence to support this study's proposition that Russian state policy today is driven by a clear vision of Russia as a recovering and somewhat restored superpower, very much on the high road back to a renewed hegemony over Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Putin's international political objectives appear largely open today: he will have Russia take whatever turns out to be available to take, preferably if the taking allows for some humiliation of the principal enemy, the United States. A practical political and strategic problem for Putin is to guess just how far he dares to push NATO in general and the United States in particular, before he finds himself, almost certainly unexpectedly, in a situation analogous to 1939. Just how dangerous would it be for Russia to press forcefully the Baltic members of NATO? Vladimir Putin would not be the first statesman to trust his luck once too often, based upon unrealistic confidence in his own political genius and power. There is danger not only that Putin could miscalculate the military worth of Russia's hand, but that he also will misunderstand the practical political and strategic strength of NATO 'red lines.' In particular, Putin may well discover, despite some current appearances, that not all of NATO's political leaders are expediently impressionable and very readily deterrable.

Putin's military instrument is heavily dependent, indeed probably over-dependent, upon the bolstering value of a whole inventory of nuclear weapons. It is unlikely to have evaded Putin's strategic grasp to recognize that these are not simply weapons like any others. A single political or strategic guess in error could well place us, Russians included, in a world horrifically new to all.

This National Institute study, *Russian Strategy: Expansion, Crisis and Conflict*, makes unmistakably clear Putin's elevation of strategic intimidation to be the leading element in Russian grand strategy today. Putin is behaving in militarily dangerous ways and 'talking the talk' that goes with such rough behavior. Obviously, he is calculating, perhaps just hoping, that American lawyers in the White House will continue to place highest priority on avoiding direct confrontation with Russia. This study presents an abundantly clear record of the Russian lack of regard for international law, which they violate with apparent impunity and without ill consequence to themselves, including virtually every arms control treaty and agreement they have entered into with the United States since 1972 (SALT I).

The challenge for the United States today and tomorrow is the need *urgently* to decide what can and must be done to stop Putin's campaign in its tracks before it wreaks lethal damage to the vital concept and physical structure of international order in much of the world, and particularly in Europe.

*Professor Colin S. Gray*

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## Preface

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This monograph, *Russian Strategy: Expansion, Crisis and Conflict*, is based on readily-available and open sources of information, particularly including numerous Russian publications. Russian foreign military actions, defense initiatives, markedly expanded conventional and nuclear arms programs, internal repression, and egregious arms control non-compliance appear to be elements of an increasingly assertive and threatening agenda. In this text, we call out and examine the apparent grand strategy underlying Russian policies, programs and behavior.

This examination demonstrates that Russian grand strategy now includes a deeply-troubling mix of ingredients: increasing hostility toward the West, including expressed military threats via statements and nuclear exercises directed against the United States and NATO countries; expanding programs to produce advanced weapons and delivery vehicles, conventional and nuclear; revisions in military doctrine that place greater emphasis on the employment of nuclear weapons, including first use; military campaigns against neighboring states; the first annexation of European territory by military force since World War II; increasing military-oriented incursions in U.S., Canadian, European and Japanese air space; arms control noncompliance; and increasing domestic repression and authoritarianism.

The December 2014 edition of Russia's military doctrine identified the United States and NATO as the top threat to Russia.<sup>1</sup> The President of Estonia, Toomas Ilves, described the current situation in Europe: "Everything that has happened since 1989 has been predicated on the fundamental assumption that you don't change borders by force, and that's now out the window."<sup>2</sup> Russian hostility and expansionist goals have been manifest at least since Russia's 2008 military action against Georgia, which reportedly was backed by an alert of Russian nuclear forces.<sup>3</sup> More recent Russian military actions include the annexation of Crimea, the support of pro-Russian rebels in Eastern Ukraine with elements of the Russian army, and unprecedented military operations in Syria.

These developments have created the potential for escalating political-military crises in Europe and may be more dangerous than were Soviet Cold War policies and behavior. In particular, as is explained herein, contemporary Russian nuclear strategy is intended to coerce the West and enforce Moscow's expansionist moves with nuclear first-use threats and planning that go well beyond Soviet Cold War behavior.

Until these most recent developments, the West generally has not considered Russia to be a security threat and there has been very little focus on Russia for two decades. U.S. attention has been elsewhere and the desire to see Russia as only a past threat has been overwhelming. Presidential candidate Mitt Romney was roundly ridiculed when he suggested in 2012 that Russia remained a priority security threat to the West, and in the same year a former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff asserted confidently that the risk of a nuclear confrontation with Russia "belongs to the past, not the future."<sup>4</sup> And, when Russia occupied Crimea in 2014, the United States was in the process of reducing U.S. military forces in Europe. Russia continues to receive limited attention. Indeed, many still dismiss the potential for an escalating crisis with Russia,<sup>5</sup> and the systematic, integrated character of pertinent Russian policies remains largely unrecognized.<sup>6</sup>

This monograph does not re-create Cold War images of Russia; it seeks instead to identify and understand emerging realities and the various threads of contemporary Russian policy and behavior in the unique context of Russian grand strategy. Such a comprehensive understanding of Russian policy and behavior will be necessary if the West is to formulate an effective counterstrategy and minimize the potential for crises and conflicts that otherwise appear inevitable. Herein are hundreds of references and statements by senior Russian officials. Perhaps the most indicative of Russia's strategic direction is by former Russian Foreign Minister Ivan Ivanov, "great powers...do not dissolve in international unions—they create them around themselves." It has become increasingly clear that the government of Vladimir Putin is willing to use naked force and coercion to that end.

A reappraisal of Russian grand strategy and its elements is long overdue following two decades of confident Western belief in benign relations with Russia, corresponding confident claims about the dwindling value of nuclear deterrence and "hard" power, and naïve expectations of a perpetual "peace dividend." This monograph is intended to provide an initial step in that reappraisal.

I would like to express my great appreciation to the Sarah Scaife Foundation for the generous support that made this monograph possible. I am equally grateful to each of the contributing authors and the Senior Reviewers who have worked diligently to help ensure its integrity, credibility and veracity, and to Amy Joseph and Matt Costlow at National Institute for their exceptionally professional efforts in support of this study's research and publication.

*Professor Keith B. Payne, Study Director*

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Isachenkov, "New Russian military doctrine says NATO top threat," *Yahoo News*, December 26, 2014, available at <http://news.yahoo.com/russian-military-doctrine-says-nato-top-threat-162432026.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Steven Erlanger, "Eastern Europe Frets About NATO's Ability to Curb Russia," *The New York Times*, April 23, 2014, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/24/world/europe/eastern-europe-frets-about-natos-ability-to-curb-russia.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Joseph, "Commentary," speech at National Defense University, Washington, D.C., *Deterrence Imperatives: Capabilities and Education*, October 8, 2015. See also Frank Miller, "Keynote Address," U.S. Strategic Command Deterrence Symposium, July 29, 2015, available at [https://www.stratcom.mil/speeches/2015/137/Keynote\\_2015\\_USSTRATCOM\\_Deterrence\\_Symposium/](https://www.stratcom.mil/speeches/2015/137/Keynote_2015_USSTRATCOM_Deterrence_Symposium/).

<sup>4</sup> James Cartwright, et al., *Global Zero U.S. Nuclear Policy Commission Report: Modernizing U.S. Nuclear Strategy, Force Structure and Posture* (Washington, D.C.: Global Zero, May 2012), p. 6, available at [http://www.globalzero.org/files/gz\\_us\\_nuclear\\_policy\\_commission\\_report.pdf](http://www.globalzero.org/files/gz_us_nuclear_policy_commission_report.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Walter Pincus, "Old Nukes and Old Thinking," *The Washington Post*, November 18, 2014, p. A-17. See also Lawrence J. Korb and Katherine Blakely, "Russia's latest provocations: Business as usual?," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, December 9, 2014, available at <http://thebulletin.org/russia%E2%80%99s-latest-provocations-business-usual7850>.

<sup>6</sup> The comprehensive and systematic character of Russian policies is highlighted in, Pavel Felgenhauer, "Preparing for War Against the US on All Fronts—A Net Assessment of Russia's Defense and Foreign Policy Since the Start of 2014," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol 11, No. 183 (October 16, 2014), available at [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=42962&cHash=da9693dcf73b5d6068df70dc07e14179#.VIXAs8nisdw](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=42962&cHash=da9693dcf73b5d6068df70dc07e14179#.VIXAs8nisdw).

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# Chapter 1. Russian Grand Strategy

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## Introduction

Different elements of Russian policy and behavior typically are examined independently, as if they are unique and unrelated. The elements of contemporary Russian grand strategy under President Vladimir Putin, however, appear to be integrated and underlie much of Russia's defense and foreign policy behavior. Russian moves that may seem disparate, such as the violation of arms control agreements and the occupation of Ukrainian territory, are in fact connected and well-orchestrated to advance the fundamental goals of Russian grand strategy.

Chapter One sets the stage for describing how Russian policies and behaviors are consistent reflections of Moscow's contemporary grand strategy by setting out the basic character of that strategy and the corresponding instruments of Russian power and influence. It explains Russian grand strategy largely in terms of Moscow's drive for authoritarian power domestically and a renewed commitment to expansion in Eurasia that is intended to establish Russian power within the areas of the former Soviet Union.

President Putin once remarked that, "The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century. And for the Russian people, it became a real drama. Tens of millions of our citizens found themselves outside the Russian Federation..."<sup>1</sup> It is now manifestly apparent that the reestablishment of the position, power and centralized, repressive authority of the past Soviet state is at the center of contemporary Russian grand strategy under President Putin. Unfortunately this goal underlying Russian grand strategy, if unmoderated, will mean crises and conflict with the West because pertinent Western states, including Ukraine, Poland, the Baltic states, and other post-Soviet states appear willing to resist this new Russian expansionism. NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has stated with regard to the current risk of Russian aggression, "NATO's core task is collective defence. Our commitment to defend each other, enshrined in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty [which established NATO], is as strong and as relevant today as ever before. That is why we are implementing the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War."<sup>2</sup>

This chapter also identifies the instruments of power corresponding to Russia's contemporary grand strategy, including: domestic repression; military capabilities and the direct use of force; Information Warfare (IW); and, Information Operations (IO). These instruments have been particularly apparent in Russia's multidimensional involvement in the on-going crisis in Ukraine. But, as NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, recently observed: "We cannot look at Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine in isolation. They are part of a disturbing pattern of Russian behavior that goes well beyond Ukraine."<sup>3</sup>

Subsequent chapters of this monograph will discuss how various elements of Russian defense and foreign policy are a reflection of the underlying Russian grand strategy, including Russia's: use of military threats and force in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine; the use of so-called "hybrid warfare" that includes both "hard" and "soft" power; renewed and mounting expressions of threat and hostility toward the West; greatly expanded nuclear and conventional force programs; and, a

pattern of noncompliance with various arms control agreements and commitments. Again, as NATO General Secretary Stoltenberg has observed regarding Russian actions: “These are not random events. They form a bigger picture, which is of great concern. Russia is a global actor that is asserting its military power, stirring up aggressive nationalism, claiming the right to impose its will on neighbors, and grabbing land.”<sup>4</sup>

Vladimir Putin appears to be the chief interpreter of Russian national interests and how those interests are served. His many remarks typically include two broad themes: the expectation of conflict and conviction that Russia is surrounded by enemies who pose an existential threat.

For example, in an October 2015 speech Putin observed: “As we analyze today’s situation, let us not forget history’s lessons. First of all, changes in the world order—and what we are seeing today are events on this scale—have usually been accompanied by if not global war and conflict, then by chains of intensive local-level conflicts.”<sup>5</sup>

In addition, Putin appears convinced that Russia is surrounded by enemies poised to attack. As he stated in April 2014: “There are enough forces in the world that are afraid of our strength, ‘our hugeness,’ as one of our sovereigns said. So, they seek to divide us into parts, this is a well-known fact.”<sup>6</sup> Putin believes that the West will go so far as to create a crisis for the purpose of harming Russia: “I’m sure that if these events [in Ukraine] had never happened ... if none of that had ever happened, they [Western powers] would have come up with some other excuse to try to contain Russia’s growing capabilities, affect our country in some way, or even take advantage of it. The policy of containment was not invented yesterday. It has been carried out against our country for many years, always, for decades, if not centuries. In short, whenever someone thinks that Russia has become too strong or independent, these tools are quickly put into use.”<sup>7</sup> Correspondingly, Putin sees developments in Europe as a zero-sum game and has characterized U.S. missile defense in Europe as, “... no less, and probably even more important, than NATO’s eastward expansion.”<sup>8</sup>

These perceptions appear to underlie Putin’s rationale for including the use of military force and other coercive tactics as tools to revise the post-Cold War settlement—to the shock and consternation of many Western leaders who had come to assume benign relations with Russia were the norm.

### **Elements of Russian Grand Strategy Under Putin**

Russia’s aggression in Ukraine illustrates the point that territorial aggrandizement, revisionism and war are elements of the Putin regime’s grand strategy. Putin’s autocracy in Russia reproduces the critical elements of the Tsarist and Soviet states. In these states the leadership effectively owns the state and national economy. There is little concept of leadership accountability (other than to higher authorities), civic rights or property rights under law. Ownership of property or control of it is conditional, based on loyalty and service to the state. From much of the Russian elite’s standpoint, this state—the only one they have ever known—is inconceivable other than as an authoritarian hegemon.<sup>9</sup> Correspondingly, Russian leaders view democracy and market economies in the former Soviet space as an intolerable danger and threat.

Russian elites believe that Russia is the natural hegemon of Europe based on history, economic power, and contemporary power relations, and that those factors should be determinative.<sup>10</sup> Moscow's stated objective of recovering its past hegemonic position and power entails the goal of Russian domination of the former Soviet bloc.<sup>11</sup> Russia makes clear that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states from the former Soviet space are contingent, disposable, and a matter of expediency. For example, well before 2014, Moscow questioned the validity of Ukraine's (and by implication other states') sovereignty.<sup>12</sup> Russian ambassadors and officials have also repeatedly denigrated the sovereignty of former Soviet republics while their ambassadors in Eastern Europe frequently express similar views concerning the territorial integrity and sovereignty of their host countries.<sup>13</sup> In June 2015 the Russian Chief Prosecutor's Office announced that it was examining whether the Soviet Union acted legally when it recognized the independence of Baltic states in 1991.<sup>14</sup>

Moscow's current approach to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and desire to revise European security, arrest European integration, and fracture the Transatlantic alliance date back to Boris Yeltsin, although in a milder form. It was then more aspiration than sustainable policy objective. Now it is established policy given the increase in Russia's economic capabilities since 2000 and military capabilities following 2008. Enhanced economic capabilities largely derive from petrodollars and energy sales while improved military capabilities follow from the defense reforms instituted after the 2008 war with Georgia. The future of Russia's economic capabilities is open to question; the nature of its grand strategy aspirations is not.

Russia keeps its military threats, including nuclear threats, primarily on the table, complemented by constant forms of non-military pressure. Military power always has been and remains present as part of a larger and more comprehensive, multi-dimensional strategy. The wars with Georgia and Ukraine demonstrate this strategy in action as do the cyber strikes against Estonia in 2007, Russian efforts to undermine the Ukrainian elections of 2004, and Moscow's unrelenting multi-dimensional pressure on the CIS and Eastern Europe.

In 2008, Putin warned President George W. Bush that Ukraine was not a state; its territory, i.e. Crimea, was a gift from Russia; and Russia would "dismember Ukraine" if it moved toward NATO.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the Russian historian Vladimir Degoev wrote in 2006 that not only must the West acknowledge Russia's vital interests in the Transcaucasus but he also stated, "If in the Caucasus, Russia will have as southern neighbors the European Union and NATO, then in this region there will never be the hoped for peace."<sup>16</sup> In 2008, Putin threatened Ukraine with nuclear weapons if it elected to have a U.S. missile defense network in its country.<sup>17</sup> More recently, Russian officials threatened Denmark with a nuclear strike and Sweden with force if it should join NATO.<sup>18</sup> Similar threats have also been made regularly against Poland for hosting U.S. military defenses.<sup>19</sup> The continuous and ongoing series of threats, probes, and displays of advanced weaponry all testify to the fact that Russia operates on the basis of intimidation, i.e. concede or suffer the consequences. Indeed, occasionally Russian spokesmen openly express the threat of war, including nuclear war.

This expansionist strategy is by no means restricted to the CIS; it applies to all of Central and Eastern Europe. Russia deems that creation of a continental bloc of former Soviet republics and satellites is an effective tool for sustaining the regime and obtaining Western acknowledgement of Russia's expansive sphere of influence. This drive for hegemony is a fundamental Russian



objective. The regime's goals of retaining power internally and increasing power externally are inseparable from this drive.

With the invasion of Ukraine, Putin's Russia now threatens states from the Baltic to the Black Sea and the Balkans. Putin also has invested considerable effort and resources to exploit Balkan rivalries and conflicts, stall conflict resolution in the former Yugoslavia, fracture European integration, and use energy sales to dominate Balkan states and their politics.<sup>20</sup> The conquest or de facto control of Ukraine would facilitate Putin's goal of re-establishing Russian dominance in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>21</sup>

President Putin's expansionist goals and actions are seen as essential for legitimizing the regime, and have become especially prominent since his return to the presidency in 2012. The mobilization or permanent semi-militarization of the country on the basis of supposed external and internal threats appear inherent in Putin's political agenda. External conflict, as in Ukraine, as many have noted, represents an effort to ensure domestic legitimacy. In fact, no greater threat could be imagined than a democratic and flourishing Ukraine that therefore must be prevented from emerging.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, one may categorize Russian strategy as a containment strategy designed to prevent the spread of democracy into the former Soviet Union, especially Russia, and to force the West to guarantee that the Putin regime will be forever immunized against this virus that it allegedly spreads to weaken Russia.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, the Russian quest for domination in Europe and Eurasia means at least a semi-permanent state of siege towards Russia's neighbors and interlocutors, and likely conflict. Russian strategy to regain dominion over the CIS is intended also to compel other governments to acknowledge Russia's position as a superpower and hegemon in the former Soviet space. Russia's strategy utilizes multiple instruments of power, including diplomacy, information, economics, and military means.<sup>24</sup> Several of these will be discussed in this chapter. The incitement and subsequent exploitation of ethnic conflicts along Russia's peripheries using these instruments of power is an integral part of this strategy.

Russian spokesmen have long maintained that Russia's strategy is indirect, asymmetrical, and primarily non-military. Yet, the use of Russia's military directly and indirectly for coercive purposes always is visible, and is now underway in Ukraine and Syria. Russia has crossed a threshold with regard to its willingness to use military force directly to change territorial boundaries in Europe.

Russian strategy is also long-term. Many Western commentators in and out of government appear to believe that the invasion of Ukraine was an improvised decision. That belief, however, reflects a misunderstanding of Russian strategy. In fact, improvisatory responses to crises through tactical flexibility are inherent in Russia's "asymmetric" strategy, which fully endorses the seizure of opportunities to further the expansive goals described above. More importantly, perhaps, the evidence is overwhelming that both Ukraine and Georgia were long-term planned contingencies, not improvisations. Putin himself acknowledged in 2012 that he began planning the 2008 war with Georgia with the use of separatists in 2006.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Moscow has been training forces for the seizure of Moldova and Ukraine since at least 2006, if not earlier; all this is a matter of public record.<sup>26</sup>

## **Components of the Quest for Dominance**

Putin's quest for autocracy and domination, if not *de jure* empire, has several individual components. First is the concentration of domestic power and authority in the Putin regime, and the corresponding repression of domestic opposition. As part of the regime's effort to consolidate its power and authority, it promotes the view that Russia is a besieged fortress under constant threat from the U.S. and the West which seek only to prevent Russia from becoming a great power and reclaiming its role as leader of a continental bloc.<sup>27</sup> Russian official statements regularly claim that threats to Russia are multiplying,<sup>28</sup> including the threat of major war (even as Russia enjoys visible conventional superiority along its European frontiers and NATO defense spending continues to decline). Threat exaggeration appears to be essential to the Russian policy process. Moreover, the Putin regime simultaneously claims that dissenters are (in classic Leninist fashion) directly tied to foreign governments and "national traitors." This reproduces classic Soviet behavior; it is no surprise that Putin allegedly views opponents either as enemies or betrayers, a classic sign of political paranoia and of the KGB's influence upon his outlook.<sup>29</sup>

Second, Russia views itself as a multi-regional great power, including in the entire European, Arctic, Caucasus, Central Asian, Middle Eastern and Northeast Asian regions. As such, Russia seeks freedom of action in a continental bloc that it dominates. In Europe, Moscow seeks to revise the 1989-91 settlement that ended the Cold War and the Soviet empire.

Such an arrangement, as envisaged by Moscow, would formalize Western acceptance of Russia's status and power claims, while also facilitating Russian opportunities to use pro-Russian factions or parties in other European countries to subvert those governments or at least exercise constant leverage and influence on their policies to reduce the prospect of a serious response to further Russian territorial aggrandizement. This aggrandizement could be based, at least rhetorically, upon Russia's claim to defend the interests, honor, and rights of Russian speakers.<sup>30</sup> In fact, Russian law since 2009 has allowed the president to send troops abroad to defend those causes without consulting the Duma. The consequences of this license for Russia's neighbors are now visible to all.<sup>31</sup>

Third, Russia's corresponding objectives in Europe translate into dominating Europe and thwarting or hollowing out the process of European integration that, in its democratic forms expressed by the EU and NATO, represent a perceived threat to Russian security. This means establishing pro-Russian and even anti-democratic beachheads of influence in European governments, consolidating economic-political ties that give Moscow extensive influence in European capitals, arresting progress in democratic government and institutions abroad, severing or severely attenuating the Transatlantic alliance, and disrupting EU or NATO expansion. This also means undermining any independent, democratically elected pro-Western governments in Ukraine and other former Soviet republics.

A decade ago, some European analysts postulated a Russian strategy in the CIS that they called "Russification" which opposes the liberal values inherent in the EU and its movement toward Western market economies.<sup>32</sup> In this context, Westernization means movement towards liberal, democratic, transparent market states and societies. Although they were discussing Transnistria (Russia's enclave that it carved out of Moldova) and Abkhazia then, the metaphor and the process equally apply throughout the former Soviet Union and the Balkans. By Russification they meant

not only the integration of targeted states' domestic structures with those of the Russian Federation, but also a process aiming to stall, if not reverse, movement toward democratic governance and the rule of law. President Putin's leadership offers the contemporary version of this model: Putin has established a regime that is authoritarian, if not totalitarian, driven by corruption and the destruction of checks and balances, and is increasingly willing to use repressive force at home to retain power and abroad to gain position. Moscow's strategy of Russification reflects its imperial goals identified above.

Fourth, an essential part of this strategy is the use of energy resources and other ties to influence European governments and to gain influence over their economies, to include a massive expansion of espionage and military threats of war to intimidate European states. This strategy is intended to discourage European governments from taking any action that undercuts Russian influence because their national (or even personal) interests depend upon maintaining good relations with Moscow.

Russia's coercive diplomacy to force its neighbors into its Eurasian Economic Union and Customs Union eliminates any pretense that this integration project is based on cooperation; it is based on what Susan Stewart of Germany's Institute for Science and Politics calls, "an offer that they cannot refuse." Furthermore, Stewart notes that Russia's coercive behavior shows its own nervousness about the viability of this approach and the necessity to coerce other states into accepting them.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, Russia encourages instability and economic weakness among neighboring countries in the belief that such conditions tend to increase Russian influence.<sup>34</sup> Other scholars have found this pattern in Central Asia and the Caucasus. With regard to Central Asia, Alexey Malashenko of the Moscow office of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has confirmed this point. While listing the goals of Russian policy in Central Asia, Malashenko writes:

This list does not mention stability since that is *not* one of Russia's unwavering strategic demands for the region. Although the Kremlin has repeatedly stressed its commitment to stability, Russia nevertheless finds shaky situations more in its interests, as the inherent potential for local or regional conflict creates a highly convenient excuse for persuading the governments of the region to seek help from Russia in order to survive.<sup>35</sup> (Italics in original)

Fifth, in recent years Russia has expanded its efforts to form partnerships or even working alliances with like-minded states, primarily China, to challenge the United States globally across a host of issue areas, e.g., the domination of the dollar and U.S. influence in international economic institutions. Russia, like China, attempts to create new modalities and sources of influence and power in world affairs, expand its influence, and challenge the pillars upon which U.S. power rests by building alternative international alliances and institutions. Currently, in Europe Putin is seeking to break the Western consensus on the sanctions placed upon Russia for its aggression against Ukraine, and thus to gain more freedom of action and leverage abroad.

Finally, Moscow seeks not just hegemony, but territorial expansion to truncate insubordinate states like Georgia and Ukraine. For example, Putin has often stated that Ukrainians and Russians are one blood and one nation and therefore, Ukraine has no right of existence as an independent, sovereign state.<sup>36</sup> Russian officials, including Putin himself, have also threatened

other countries: Putin has asserted that Kazakhstan was not a state before 1991;<sup>37</sup> and as noted above, Russia's Chief Prosecutor announced that he will investigate the legality of the Supreme Soviet's decision granting the Baltic States independence in 1991.

## Instruments of Power

Russia employs multiple instruments of power to support its grand strategy, including the broad Soviet concept of a "correlation of forces." The Russian concept of the correlation of forces includes what Moscow believes is Russia's greater will to suffer, if necessary to prevail, given the passion of its animating strategic vision. Noted Russian journalist, Alexander Golts, has observed that the leadership in Moscow is prepared to demand the suffering necessary for its vision.<sup>38</sup>

Correspondingly, Russian strategy focuses on psychological factors of will and endurance, including the loyalty of citizens to the regime. As a result, Moscow places importance on its information warfare and information operations at home and abroad. These concepts transcend taking down networks, hacking, and cyber-crime, to include systematic long-term mass information manipulation and shaping on a global scale. With Russia's belief that it is perpetually in a state of conflict with the West, it conducts constant ongoing information operations as part of its strategy, e.g., hacking and propaganda, and cyber-espionage. This explains the great attention given to influencing or controlling the media at home and abroad and to the systematic massive use of propaganda.

Russia also utilizes energy sales and the threat of withholding energy resources to obtain leverage up and downstream in European states, and to impress others with its power and prowess. It also appears to fund foreign political parties, movements and leaders, particularly foreign media conglomerates, to influence Eurasian political leaders, institutions and media. Additionally, Moscow reportedly spends lavishly on IW and IO abroad to buy experts and "talking heads" to advance Russian interests with the patina of expert respectability and arguments for accepting Russia's narratives about its goals and actions.<sup>39</sup>

## Military Instruments

Russian military tools in support of Moscow's strategic goals should be seen in a broad context. Frequently, Russia uses its military to threaten and thereby intimidate and coerce foreign audiences. Talk of war, nuclear strikes and other military rhetoric has been a constant feature of state policy under Putin since 2007.<sup>40</sup> As the economist and commentator Andrei Illarionov (who formerly advised the Russian government) observed in 2009:

Since its outset, the *siloviki* regime [the Russian name for political leaders drawn from the Russian security and military services] has been aggressive. At first it focused on actively destroying centers of independent political, civil, and economic life within Russia. Upon achieving those goals, the regime's aggressive behavior turned outward beyond Russia's borders. At least since the assassination of the former Chechen President Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev in Doha, Qatar on 14 February 2004, aggressive behavior by SI [Siloviki] in the international arena has become the rule rather than the exception. Over the last five years the regime has waged ten different "wars" (most of them involving propaganda, intelligence operations, and economic coercion rather than open military force) against

neighbors and other foreign nations. The most recent targets have included Ukraine (subjected to a “second gas war” in early 2009), the United States (subjected to a years-long campaign to rouse anti-American sentiment), and, most notoriously, Georgia (actually bombed and invaded in 2008).

In addition to their internal psychological need to wage aggressive wars, a rational motive is also driving the *siloviki* to resort to conflict. War furnishes the best opportunities to distract domestic public opinion and destroy the remnants of the political and intellectual opposition within Russia itself. An undemocratic regime worried about the prospect of domestic economic, social, and political crises—such as those that now haunt Russia amid recession and falling oil prices—is likely to be pondering further acts of aggression. The note I end on, therefore, is a gloomy one: To me, the probability that Siloviki Incorporated will be launching new wars seems alarmingly high. (*Italics in original*)<sup>41</sup>

Russia’s defense spending rose steadily after the year 2000. Since the 2008 war against Georgia, Russia’s militarization accelerated and deepened with large-scale comprehensive nuclear and conventional buildups despite challenging economic conditions and growing domestic repression. This has coincided with movement toward a domestic system that combines traditional Russian autocracy with totalitarian behaviors and the intensification of domestic IW to keep the population in a state of perpetual mobilization against foreign and/or domestic enemies.

In the 2014 invasion of Ukraine and subsequent events, Russia used both military threats and the direct employment of military power. Moscow also has used direct force in Moldova and Georgia, as well as waging an unending war in the North Caucasus. In short, the Russian state has been and continues to be forged by both war and the threatened use of force.

Russia also continues to seek expansion of weapon sales and the number of buyer states, often to achieve foreign military bases and/or influence. In general, Moscow openly covets new foreign bases in Latin America, the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Balkans and the Middle East.<sup>42</sup> Russia also uses arms sales to win friends in the CIS and in the Caucasus to perpetuate the frozen conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Russian military sales policy thus complements Russian foreign policy throughout the entire post-Soviet space to create and then exploit continuing conflicts and instability for its benefit, a circumstance that could become the future status quo in Ukraine.<sup>43</sup>

Many analysts have noted Moscow’s exploitation of conflicts across the Caucasus and even Central Asia. As Susan Stewart writes:

Russia is more than willing to tolerate instability and economic weakness in the neighboring countries, assuming they are accompanied by an increase in Russian influence. In fact, Russia consciously contributes to the rising instability and deterioration of the economic situation in some, if not all, of these countries.<sup>44</sup>

Richard Giragosian, Founding Director of the Regional Studies Center in Yerevan, observes that in the Caucasus:

Russia is clearly exploiting the unresolved Karabakh conflict and rising tension in order to further consolidate its power and influence in the South Caucasus. Within this context, Russia has not only emerged as the leading arms provider to Azerbaijan, but also continues to deepen its military support and cooperation with Armenia. For Azerbaijan, Russia offers an important source of modern offensive weapons, while for Armenia, both the bilateral partnership with Russia and membership in the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) offers Armenia its own essential security guarantees.<sup>45</sup>

The independent Caucasus-based analyst Eugene Kogan recently reached the same conclusion:

Moscow remains determined to block conflict resolution as conflict resolution would eliminate much of its leverage and pretexts for militarizing the area even though it is increasingly clear that Moscow has not arrested the disintegration of the North Caucasus by these forceful policies.<sup>46</sup>

Other analysts also have reached this conclusion:

In the case of Azerbaijan, the government of Azerbaijan needs to understand that as long as President Putin sees no personal benefits for him and his government in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict's resolution, Moscow will retain the policy of status quo, which is best for its own interests. The other two parties, namely the co-chairs of the Minsk Group—France and the US—will do nothing to change the situation as long as it cannot change in their favor.<sup>47</sup>

In short, it appears that Russia has an interest in exploiting “shaky situations” in Central Asia to enhance its control.<sup>48</sup>

Moscow views the NATO alliance as a permanent and primary enemy waging a multi-dimensional war against it. The supposed threat envisions NATO drawing closer to block Russia's efforts to recreate a de facto empire in the CIS and thus a “state of siege” exists in Russian relations with NATO and the EU. Given Moscow's view that it has an inherently conflictual relationship with the West, nuclear weapons take priority in Russian procurement policy. Nuclear capabilities are intended to compensate for Russia's inadequacies in conventional capabilities compared to NATO's potential. Nuclear weapons, threats of their use and the threat of their further deployment, e.g. in the Russian Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad, are used to deter, intimidate and coerce Western states.

For example, the many official Russian statements claiming Russia's right to deploy nuclear weapons in Crimea reflects efforts to intimidate the West from acting against Moscow and to convey Moscow's determination to retain Crimea, and thus to deter any action against its overall policies in Ukraine. Russian nuclear weapons and multiplying nuclear threats—including long-range bomber patrols against the United States and Europe—aim to deter any Western action against Russia, and to intimidate the West into accepting Russian conquests as irrevocable faits accomplis.

This political use of nuclear weapons is not confined to the present crisis. Similar moves reportedly occurred during the 2008 Georgian war,<sup>49</sup> affirming Moscow's belief that if it lacked nuclear weapons, the West might intervene against Russian aggression in the CIS. Russia sees its nuclear arsenal, in part, as the instrument that can prevent robust Western responses to its aggression and occupation of neighboring territories. This is a new and fundamentally coercive role for Russian nuclear weapons and does not reflect Western mutual nuclear deterrence notions of the Cold War.

Russian statements about nuclear weapons have moved beyond the clear desire to deter and intimidate the West to include potential operational employment. As the British analyst Roger McDermott has written,

The Russian military understanding of these weapons and reliance on them in certain scenarios suggests that they play a significant role in security thinking, which has grown and may continue to grow until Russia can successfully redress its conventional weaknesses. This is borne out in official statements, as well as in the role assigned to them in operational-strategic exercises.... It is therefore important to understand that Russia regards these weapons differently than the West: for Moscow they do not simply have political value, they play a role in military planning that compensates for conventional weakness, and in certain scenarios are considered to be operational systems.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, Russian nuclear weapons, whether they be strategic or tactical nuclear weapons could, in severe circumstances, be used in combat operations. The apparent Russian willingness to employ nuclear weapons likely contributes to their coercive effect.

Russia also has undertaken a complementary large-scale conventional force buildup since 2008, the purpose of which is to field a potent high-tech military. Those conventional assets, used often in innovative ways, as seen in Ukraine, can occupy territory and also intimidate CIS and European governments, and thus support conventional deterrence as suggested in the 2014 defense doctrine.<sup>51</sup>

Russia's military strategy, however, is not just one of deterrence and coercion. It envisages and prepares for periodic military aggression against neighbors to revise post-Cold War status quo boundaries while deterring a NATO response.

Lastly, Russia's espionage and intelligence penetration of Western governments and defense technology have reached the same or exceeded levels of the Brezhnev years that represented the acme of Soviet espionage efforts against the West.<sup>52</sup> In addition, Spanish prosecutor Jose Grinda reportedly informed the U.S. embassy in Spain that Russia uses organized crime gangs to carry out covert operations on its behalf.<sup>53</sup>

## **Information Warfare**

As discussed briefly above, Russia employs IW and IO to shape mass consciousness and perceptions for multiple military as well as political purposes. Information warfare is a form of warfare that either attacks or employs information technology to secure tactical, operational, and/or strategic objectives whether they require taking down networks, weapons systems, or the

mass political manipulation of targeted audiences. Information operations are the specific operations using or targeting information networks that are carried out as part of the overall strategic plan.

The first priority for Russia's IW has been saturating Russian domestic media to promote the loyalty of the Russian people to Putin. Russian IW and IO also pay special attention to the global milieu. It includes the recruitment of a huge international network of commentators ("trolls") employed to criticize any media comments in the West that reflect poorly on Moscow, pump out anti-Western propaganda, discredit critics of Russia and Russian policy, and drown out media reporting that criticizes Putin.<sup>54</sup>

IW and IO are also regularly employed in service of other objectives. For example, Russian IW includes a sustained media campaign against the dollar and the alleged perfidiousness of U.S. economic policy to undermine the dollar as the main global currency.<sup>55</sup>

Domestic IO's aim to isolate regime enemies and strengthen public loyalty by creating an atmosphere of quasi-permanent mobilization against all manner of foreign and domestic enemies. Moscow's efforts testify to its belief that popular support is a major center of gravity for its regime and power. These efforts appear to have had considerable success—President Putin has an apparent approval rating within Russia of 89 percent.<sup>56</sup>

Moscow also intends to control the narrative of its actions abroad to help inhibit a forceful Western response to its war in Ukraine and other aggressions. Instead, Moscow's IOs emphasize the need for a new American dialogue with Moscow that acknowledges Russia's spheres of influence. It is very easy to spot this goal in foreign and Russian publications and public meetings with Russian spokesmen, apologists, and defenders. Johnson's *Russia List* (a daily compendium of articles on Russia sponsored by George Washington University's Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies) performs an admirable service in making many of these articles available on a daily basis. The common theme is that current conflicts in Western relations with Russia are America's fault. This charge is bolstered by the ever-present fear that a further breakdown in relations could lead to Russian isolation and potentially war. These examples exemplify the process whereby military threats, IW and IO merge for a common purpose.

Russia's army of "trolls" also serves to overwhelm and discredit critics and critiques of Russia. This effort is intended to shape Western elite thinking in a direction favorable to Moscow.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Peter Pomerantsev of the Legatum Institute in London has argued that the point is to induce cynicism and inaction abroad to prevent action against Russia.<sup>58</sup>

IW and IO serve other purposes as well in military strategy. There is good reason to conclude that Russia's IO against Georgia in 2008 was intended to provide Moscow with a pretext to destroy Georgian military might and detach South Ossetia and Abkhazia without suffering any serious Western riposte.<sup>59</sup> Elsewhere, e.g. in Kyrgyzstan and Estonia, Russia reportedly used IW, respectively, to instigate a domestic coup against a regime that Moscow deemed insufficiently trustworthy and subservient and, in 2007, reportedly to conduct a massive cyber-attack on Estonian infrastructure in an apparent attempt to coerce the Estonian government.<sup>60</sup> In such cases, Russian IW serves as a multi-functional and multi-dimensional weapon usable in diverse environments to control the narrative of politics and conflict, inhibit enemy action, and shape



foreign and domestic thinking, even as it is also used to corrupt, destroy, and take down networks and facilitate espionage.

### **The Continuing Crisis: Russia's War in Ukraine**

Russia's naked aggression in Ukraine represents the first time since World War II that the border of a European state has been changed by external force and arguably is the greatest threat to international order since Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990. Displaying innovative tactics that share similarities to the German Anschluss with Austria in 1938 and the Russian occupation and annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russian operations in Ukraine have been called hybrid war.<sup>61</sup>

Russia consciously and meticulously planned a takeover of Crimea and launched it when the Ukrainian government of Victor Yanukovich in Kiev fell in February 2014, not as an act of ad hoc improvisation but as a long-planned-for strategic operation in response to the immediate opportunity.<sup>62</sup>

Subsequently, in the Donbass region of Ukraine, Russia launched a second effort along similar lines, hoping to duplicate the success of the Crimean operation. Here, however, Moscow failed to achieve immediate victory and has encountered staunch Ukrainian resistance and a lack of support on the ground for its expansionist efforts. Although Moscow is utilizing multiple instruments against Ukraine and to thwart Western diplomatic and economic sanctions, the actual military operations are conventional armor and artillery duels and encirclements or threatened encirclements. They involve substantial use of Russian equipment, commanders, the periodic mobilization of about 50,000 Russian troops on the border, and the dispatch of about 9,000 Russian troops.<sup>63</sup> Despite continued Russian denials, the evidence of direct Russian military participation is irrefutable.<sup>64</sup>

Today, there exists the threat of further expansion of the conflict into other areas of Ukraine through Russian offensives, aggressive IW campaigns to blunt Western responses and hide the truth from the Russian population, and unremitting economic and energy pressure on the Ukrainian economy. Some reports suggest Russian support for bombings in Khar'kiv and Odessa.<sup>65</sup> The Russian strategic goal appears to be the creation of an extended belt of territory directly from Russia, along the entire Crimean coast all the way to Transnistria. This goal includes reuniting ethnic Russians, adding to the declining Slavic population cohort in Russia, seizing Ukraine's energy assets in Crimea, destroying an independent pro-Western Ukraine, and establishing control over the Black Sea.<sup>66</sup>

These Russified territories would then form a new "state"—Novorossia (new Russia)—based on an ethnic or Russian-speaking component that Russia could then use to put pressure on states from the Baltic to Tajikistan on the basis of the popular notion of regathering supposedly "holy" Russian lands. The similarity of this strategic goal and its constituent elements to Germany's in the late 1930s is visible in Putin's actions and speeches, most notably his Duma speech on March 18, 2014 after the "referendum" in Crimea.<sup>67</sup>

At the same time, Russia's aggressive and threatening moves directed at Sweden, Finland, and NATO members continue to the present and appear designed to intimidate Western governments and deter a Western response to Russian aggression.<sup>68</sup> Moscow is also concurrently invoking

the threat of a general European war, including the use of nuclear weapons, to attempt to force NATO and the EU to pursue only very limited responses to Russia's expansionist moves in Ukraine.<sup>69</sup>

Putin's objectives evidently are to preclude the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state that is pro-Western. Noted Russian journalist, Pavel Felgenhauer, has described Putin's fundamental position: "Putin continues to think of Ukraine as an integral part of the Russian World (Russkiy Mir)... A pro-Western Ukraine separate from Russia is an abomination that must be stopped."<sup>70</sup> A corresponding Russian goal appears to be to absorb at least portions of Eastern Ukraine. The addition of these territories would add to the Slavic population that is otherwise in steady decline in Russia, demonstrate NATO's impotence, and by dismembering Ukraine, ensure that Moscow's long tradition of considering itself the sole legitimate heir of the medieval Russian State, *Kievan Rus'* (the capital of which was Kiev), is not undermined by Ukraine's repudiation of Russia. Imperial territorial gains serve multiple domestic purposes for Putin, including buttressing his increasingly coercive and repressive efforts to stay in power by stoking nationalistic sentiment.

At present it is uncertain if Moscow will launch a major new offensive against Ukraine or other Central European targets, but Putin is unlikely to renounce his conquests and, therefore, a renewed state of siege is now the most likely order in Europe. This may not be a new Cold War because Russia is not the USSR and the global order is not bipolar. Neither can Russia seriously challenge with conventional military force a united West that is determined to defend its interests and values. But the current and foreseeable reality cannot be described as peace and stability. Unless and until Russia adopts a more benign grand strategy, the outlook is for crises and protracted conflict occurring in multiple dimensions and theaters.

## **Conclusions**

Russia's domestic political system under Putin is oriented to expansionist policies and is predicated on recasting Russia as a de facto empire. The inherent revisionism of Russian policy and its fundamental anti-liberalism makes anti-Americanism the default option of Russian policy. Cooperation, where possible is tactical and instrumental, not a result of a strategic rapprochement. This applies to arms control accords where Moscow feels free to break inconvenient agreements.

Russia's overall security policies begin with the presupposition of conflict with most of its interlocutors and thus entails a consistent bias toward the militarization of its domestic and foreign policies. Domestic dissent is equated to treason by fifth columnists linked to external enemies and virtually all elements of domestic policy are viewed through this prism.<sup>71</sup>

Given these continuing and strongly rooted factors, Russia's conventional and nuclear buildup will continue as long as Russia can afford it and Putin retains power, even if he must ratchet back the level or scope of this buildup as a result of economic pressures. The dangerous threat environment for the West described above will not change unless there are dramatic changes in Russia's expansionist goals and Russia's willingness to use any and all forms of pressure to advance them, i.e., Russia's grand strategy. Absent such a change in Russia's strategic goals, U.S. and NATO conciliatory behavior/actions are likely to present an image of disunity and indecision, and thereby potentially provoke further Russian belligerence.

The usual Western hope that arms control will address threats and relieve it of the need to respond more forcefully appears particularly fanciful now. Putin is little interested in new arms control and is manifestly willing to violate existing agreements. As will be discussed in Chapters Two and Five, Russia has systematically violated the Helsinki Final Act, all the treaties with Ukraine and other CIS governments on the inviolability of borders, and the 1994 Budapest Accord with Washington, London and Kiev on Ukraine's denuclearization; it also has broken the INF treaty, the CFE treaty (Conventional Forces in Europe) and its political promises in the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives.

Unfortunately, abundant evidence points to the continuing mobilization of Russia for a long-term state of siege with the West, if not actual war, as Moscow continues to insist that it is secure only if all its interlocutors are not. A mobilization policy initiated by 2009 has greatly accelerated since 2013. If Russia cannot escape from the Putin regime's anti-Western hostility and insistence upon hegemony, the ensuing state of siege will be a source of crises and conflict for years. Perhaps most dangerous is the fact that Putin is not a magician who can control the nationalism and militarism he has inflamed. As the then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin Dempsey said in July 2014, "If I have a fear about this it's that Putin may actually light a fire that he loses control of."<sup>72</sup> Indeed, crises and conflict are the logical consequences of Putin's expansionist grand strategy.

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## Chapter 2. Continuity in Russian Strategy: The Wars Against Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine

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### Introduction

Russia's actions against its neighbors for more than a decade demonstrate that a hallmark of Russian policy in the former Soviet area is expansion, domination and coercion. Russia's coercive operations exemplify new trends in warfare actively directed against other countries' civilian infrastructures. Indeed, Russia's war in Ukraine (Crimea, the Donbass and Luhansk) is an exercise in cross-domain coercion, including the threatened use of nuclear weapons to send coercive signals and messages to the West.

Russia's operations and policies reflect a comprehensive strategy employing all instruments of power.<sup>1</sup> They also reflect a fundamental continuity of objectives from the 1990s to the present as well as a steady refinement and maturation of Russian capabilities and tactics for achieving those objectives. The use of IW or IO, intelligence subversion of politicians and political institutions, the threat of invasion and nuclear coercion—when combined with the use of the ethnic card regarding compatriots abroad and the direct use of military force—represents a potentially lethal form of warfare designed to destabilize a state. This combination may serve as a paradigm for what is increasingly called hybrid war, which NATO is now preparing to counter.<sup>2</sup>

Russia's expressed rationale for military intervention in neighboring areas goes back over a decade. In 2003, speaking about Russia's then-recently released white paper on military policy, Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov observed that Moscow could use preventive force in cases where a threat is growing and is "visible, clear, and unavoidable." Ivanov added that military force could be used, "If there is an attempt to limit Russia's access to regions that are essential to its survival, or those that form an important [area], from an economic or financial point of view."<sup>3</sup> Russia's operations are not restricted to direct force, but also assume economic, informational, and diplomatic forms depending on the targets and circumstances at any given time.

Moscow's wars against its neighbors reflect two other trends: first, the steady increase in Russia's capabilities (not just military) after 2000, and second, the steadily hardening Russian belief that the United States and the West are determined to undermine Russia by sponsoring so-called color revolutions in states like Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, as well as in Russia itself. The apparent perception of Vladimir Putin and his team is that the survival of Russia demands the suppression of democratic and pro-Western trends.

As discussed in Chapter One, several principles of Russian policy and behavior are apparent in Russia's expansionism. First, Russia's definition of itself as a "great power" entitled to dominate these territories is intrinsic to Putin's overall goal to stay in power and legitimize his rule by successfully invoking an imperial and authoritarian tradition. Although this self-conception long predates Vladimir Putin, he has embraced and strengthened it. Thus, in then-Prime Minister Putin's 1999 official submission to the EU of Russia's strategy for relations with that organization, the Russian government stated that:



As a world power situated on two continents, Russia should retain its freedom to determine and implement its foreign and domestic policies, its status and advantages of a Euro-Asian state and largest country of the [Commonwealth of Independent States] CIS... The development of partnership with the EU should contribute to consolidating Russia's role as the leading power in shaping a new system of interstate political and economic relations in the CIS area.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, in 2003, Deputy Foreign Minister Ivan Ivanov stated:

Our country is not in need of affiliation with the EU. This would entail loss of its unique Euro-Asian specifics, the role of the center of attraction of the re-integration of the CIS, independence in foreign economic and defense policies, and complete restructuring (once more) of all Russian statehood based on the requirements of the European Union. Finally great powers (and it is too soon to abandon calling ourselves such) do not dissolve in international unions -- they create them around themselves.<sup>5</sup>

The Russian political scientist Egor Kholmogorov has observed that:

'Empire' is the main category of any strategic political analysis in the Russian language. Whenever we start to ponder a full-scale, long-term construction of the Russian state, we begin to think of empire and in terms of empire. Russians are inherently imperialists.<sup>6</sup>

Russian political scientist Alexander Savkin similarly observes, "Russia's unique capacity to integrate other peoples and cultures has enabled it to be [the] centrally formative element on the Eurasian continent for three centuries."<sup>7</sup>

This mode of thought has seized the Russian analytical community and logically leads to the second observable principle. If Russia wishes to dominate the post-Soviet space, NATO or EU membership of the former Soviet republics or even of Russia's erstwhile satellites in Eastern Europe becomes a zero-sum loss and a threat to Russian sovereignty. Indeed, Russia's new maritime doctrine states that it is unacceptable for NATO to enhance its capabilities in countries near Russia's borders.<sup>8</sup> Moscow appears committed to the view that Russia's neighbors do not possess the sovereign right to choose an independent course that is seen in Moscow as a threat to Russia.

A third and related principle is that neighboring states, principally nearby CIS countries, must defer to Russia as the organizing great power. The inadmissibility of those states as part of the West and NATO is connected to this point—their sovereignty and territorial integrity must yield to Russian demands for security. Indeed, the sovereign freedom to choose the West is deemed a threat to the foundations of the Russian state, therefore, and must be suppressed.

In short, under Putin all Russia's neighbors must accede to the old Brezhnev principle of Soviet times that other members of the Soviet bloc must accept a diminished sovereignty vis-à-vis the Soviet Union—Moscow alone has the capability, right and duty to intervene, including by force, in furtherance of Russian security interests. Indeed, according to Alexander Golts, prior to the 2008 Russian war with Georgia, Moscow distributed Russian "passports to the people of Abkhazia and

South Ossetia” because “when interstate crises reach a boiling point, they must be resolved through war.”<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the fourth principle of contemporary Russian policy is that to achieve these objectives Russia will incite or exploit post-Soviet ethnic rivalries in these territories to help block further Western integration around democratic principles.

A major part of this exploitation of ethnic conflicts pertains to the issue of the Russian diaspora abroad that remained in former Soviet republics when the Soviet state collapsed in 1991. The Russian Foreign Ministry recently announced that it is formulating legislation to confer Russian citizenship on all former Soviet residents, giving Russia the domestic legal right to intervene throughout the entire former Soviet territory.<sup>10</sup> This builds on a 2014 law to grant citizenship to all “who speak Russian, and have at least one ancestor who was a permanent resident of any state within the borders of the current Russian Federation.”<sup>11</sup> The attempt to claim a special privilege or right for Russia to defend this Russian diaspora predates Putin. What has changed is Russia’s willingness and capacity to assert that right regardless of opposition.

On August 31, 2008, immediately following war with Georgia, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev enunciated foreign policy principles that gave Russia license to intervene militarily in other states where a Russian minority allegedly was at risk. And, in 2009, Russia promulgated a law that gave the president sole discretion to use armed forces to invade neighbors if the “honor and dignity” of Russians abroad was violated. Thus, the legislative basis for the war in Ukraine preceded the conflict by years and reflected the principles invoked by Putin in his justifications of the invasion of first Crimea and then the Donbass.

A 2009 analysis by noted foreign policy analyst Yuri Fedorov accurately forecast the consequences of this law. Fedorov observed that:

The new Russian legislation has radically expanded the range of circumstances under which Moscow considers it legitimate to deploy troops abroad, as well as the list of states in which Russia may station armed forces in accordance with the law.<sup>12</sup>

This law radically altered the security situation in the CIS because it provided Russia a seeming domestic legal platform for justifying its unilateral intervention into any of the other members’ territory.

Medvedev freed himself and his successors from any constraint of consultation with Russian legislative bodies over this decision. In other words, a Russian president could send troops abroad under vague pretexts without accountability.<sup>13</sup> As noted Russian defense journalist Pavel Felgenhauer observed, this law represented a constitutional coup.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, Moscow also assiduously fans the flames of ethnic issues throughout the former Soviet Union even where the ethnic groups involved are not Russians. Thus, in addition to supporting Bessarabian and Carpathian movements for autonomy in Ukraine, Russia reportedly supports the Talysh and Javakhetian minorities in Azerbaijan, the Karakalpaks in Uzbekistan, Latgalians in Latvia, and the Gagauz in Moldova. Moscow appears to support these movements in order to break up these states or at least keep them under constant pressure. Consequently,

and given the long-standing Tsarist and Soviet tendencies to utilize this tactic, virtually every government in Eastern Europe and the former USSR sees Russian calls for federalism as calls for much weaker governments or for their dissolution.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, it appears that the original Russian military objective of the Ukrainian campaign was to carve out a belt of Russian territory embracing Donetsk and Luhansk provinces in Ukraine, Ukraine's entire Crimean coast, and Crimea itself all the way to Transnistria. This would destroy any basis for Ukrainian independent statehood, amputate its territory, and create a new jurisdiction which, as mentioned in Chapter One, Putin has labeled "Novorossia."<sup>16</sup> Yet, as Professor Patricia Herlihy of Brown University observes, these areas are not really populated by ethnic Russian majorities.<sup>17</sup>

Experts have long stated that Russia rejects the idea that its neighbors have full sovereignty and territorial integrity despite the many treaties to which they are parties. James Sherr of Chatham House has written that:

While Russia formally respects the sovereignty of its erstwhile republics, it also reserves the right to define the content of that sovereignty and their territorial integrity. Essentially Putin's Russia has revived the Tsarist and Soviet view that sovereignty is a contingent factor depending on power, culture, and historical norms, not an absolute and unconditional principle of world politics.<sup>18</sup>

Sherr correspondingly wrote that, "For 20 years the Russian Federation has officially—not privately, informally or covertly, but officially—equated its own security with the limited sovereignty of its neighbors."<sup>19</sup>

In short, Putin's gambits in Moldova, Georgia, and now Ukraine are not improvisations or anomalies. Rather they stand at the center of Russian policy vis-à-vis its neighbors. These three cases are discussed below to further illustrate this point.

### **Moldova and Transnistria: The First lesson of Russian Policy; Playing the Ethnic Card and Using the Army, Trade, and Energy**

The political contest between ethnic Moldovans and Russians in Transnistria (which originally joined with Moldova when it left the USSR) originated as a move by local Russian and Communist elites to break with Moldova and to win the support of Russian forces which independently seized Transnistria in 1992.<sup>20</sup> Subsequent Russian policy aimed to freeze that conflict in place in order to preserve permanent pressure on Moldova.

Soon after becoming President in 2000, Putin revealed his thinking about Moldova in terms that strikingly prefigure his policies on Ukraine in 2014. Putin invoked the Russian diaspora and other ethnic minorities in an effort to gain more influence over Moldova and its frozen conflict. Subsequently in 2003-2004, Putin sponsored a plan crafted by Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Kozak, and rebuffed by Moldova, leading to perpetual tension between Moldova and Moscow. An assessment of the Kozak plan observed that its:

Institutional features were designed to provide Transnistria a veto over any legislation that would threaten the leadership. Ultimately these multiple loci of vetoes would make it impossible for the federal government to operate. In addition, the Kozak Memorandum included clauses that could be interpreted to easily dissolve the federation. For example, the Kozak Memorandum allowed for subjects of the federation to have the right “to leave the federation in case a decision is taken to unite the federation with another state and (or) in connection with the federation’s full loss of sovereignty. --- [thus] Moldovan integration with international organizations such as the EU could be used as a basis for the dissolution of the federation under this clause.”<sup>21</sup>

It is not lost on Ukrainian lawmakers that these terms are similar to Putin’s current demands upon Ukraine. Indeed, the Kozak plan reads like an original draft for Putin’s current demands for Ukrainian federalization and the granting of veto rights over foreign and trade policy to Donetsk and Luhansk provinces in order to make Ukraine permanently ungovernable and vulnerable to Russian pressure and takeover. In 2015, Putin made these objectives very clear:

First is the amendment to the Ukrainian Constitution providing autonomous rights to these territories, or, as the official representatives in Kiev prefer to say, resolving the issue of the so-called decentralisation of power.

Second is adopting the Ukrainian law on amnesty for many individuals in the Donetsk and Luhansk republics.

Third is implementing the law on the special status of Donbass: Luhansk and Donetsk.

Fourth is adopting the Ukrainian law on local government and holding those elections; and,

Fifth is ending the economic embargo against these territories.<sup>22</sup>

There is a striking consistency in Putin’s policies since 2000. The difference from then to now is the balance of forces, or to use a Soviet concept, the “correlation of the forces” involved. It is not surprising that possible EU and U.S. intervention at the last hour to block the Kozak Plan apparently enraged Putin and the Kremlin, demonstrating that their idea of partnership with the West, which assumed a free hand to reorganize Eurasia, was incompatible with the interests and values of Brussels and Washington.<sup>23</sup> One particular sticking point was the refusal of the Russian government to withdraw its armed forces from Transnistria.

Having established a military occupation of Transnistria and the precedent of military intervention on behalf of Russians there, Putin continues to exploit those factors and add a panoply of economic pressures on Moldova to consolidate gains there and establish (as Putin tried to do in 2014) the basis for further advances. Thus, Russia has frequently cut off energy supplies or launched trade embargoes on key Moldovan and then Georgian products such as wine, mineral water, meat, fruits, and vegetables.<sup>24</sup> And, as noted above, since 2013 there have been increased signs of Russian interest in annexing Transnistria to Russia in conjunction with Moscow’s objectives concerning Ukraine.

In the winter of 2013, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin demanded that Moldova reject an Association Agreement with the EU.<sup>25</sup> When Moldova refused, Rogozin responded that he hoped Moldova would have a warm winter—an obvious threat to curtail Russian gas supplies. Moldova initiated an Association Agreement with the EU at Vilnius in November 2013 despite Russian threats.<sup>26</sup> Russia has periodically albeit unsuccessfully imposed sanctions, blockades, oil and gas shortages, and price hikes to force Moldova to renounce its European choice. Moscow may desist from moving further against Moldova militarily, but it has clearly created a climate of fear and alarm there and in neighboring Romania, and Russia reportedly retains the military power to initiate an operation against Moldova like that mounted in Ukraine.<sup>27</sup>

### **Georgia: The Sequence of Events leading to War**

In Georgia, both before and after the 2008 war with Russia, Moscow used and expanded the same basic tactics used in Moldova. Indeed, Putin admitted in 2012 that he had preplanned the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 as early as 2006 with the deliberate cultivation of separatists.<sup>28</sup> He said, “the Russian General Staff drew up a plan for a war against Georgia in late 2006 and early 2007.”<sup>29</sup> General Yury Baluyevski echoed the point.<sup>30</sup>

Moscow’s tactics in advance of the 2008 war followed the script first worked out for Moldova and later refined in Ukraine.<sup>31</sup> Here, too, those measures combined multiple instruments of power at Moscow’s disposal—diplomatic and political pressure, economic warfare, systematic information attacks, and lastly, albeit more dramatically, military force in 2008.

In Georgia, Moscow had several apparent objectives, including: prevent the expansion of NATO or the EU to Georgia; demonstrate that these organizations could not and would not protect Georgia; and, reassert Russian domination by demonstrating Russia’s ability to take Georgian territory in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia sought to demonstrate that any effort to join Western security organizations would carry a price and could bring about a change of government in Georgia.<sup>32</sup> In this context, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov’s 2007 declaration that Moscow would not allow Georgia to join NATO indicates that he and his government viewed Georgia not as a sovereign state, but, as noted above, one whose sovereignty and integrity depended on Russia’s assessment of its own interests.<sup>33</sup>

Again, the foundation for this approach was established in the 1990s, as Russia’s presence in Georgia grew out of its so-called peacekeeping mission there to quell ethnic wars between Tbilisi and its rebellious provinces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In 1995, Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev argued that no international organization or group of states could substitute for Russia’s peacekeeping efforts in “this specific post-Soviet space.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, Russia’s foreign minister suggested the prerogatives of Russian power and authority in the former Soviet Union.

In 2002, then-Colonel General Yury Baluyevski claimed Russian license to “pursue armed gangs on Georgian territory in the event gunmen attempt to enter Russia and to hide in Georgia...”<sup>35</sup> Russian relations with Georgia steadily deteriorated as Russia’s determination to suppress Georgian independence increasingly collided with Georgia’s nationalism and comparable determination to assert that independence and move closer to the West (as expressed in the Rose Revolution of 2003 that brought Mikhail Sakaashvili to power in Georgia).

Sakaashvili's determination to restore Georgian rule in South Ossetia and Abkhazia soon clashed with Putin's resolve to prevent Georgia's westernization and to retain Russian influence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Although, in 2005, Moscow announced that it would vacate its bases in Georgia by 2008, it reportedly reinforced its positions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and took control of local administration; moreover, in 2006 Moscow reportedly began to upgrade its espionage activities in Georgia.<sup>36</sup> Predictably, Russia initiated sanctions against the export of key Georgian commodities, namely Georgian wine, just as it has periodically done to Moldova.<sup>37</sup> Russia conducted this economic warfare in tandem with intensifying information, political, and military pressures against Georgia in advance of the 2008 war.

By 2007, Russian newspapers were openly speculating about the upcoming war with Georgia and Russian military provocations became routine; Moscow's clients in Abkhazia and South Ossetia were now working steadily with Moscow, agitating for independence from Georgia. Moscow's suspension of its observance of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE) also allowed its military buildup in the Caucasus, increased exercises and training to continue unobserved.<sup>38</sup> Also during this period, Moscow accelerated its policies to hand out Russian passports to Abkhazians and South Ossetians in order for them to lay claim to Russian citizenship and Moscow's protection.

In 2008, four months before the war with Georgia, Chief of the General Staff Baluyevski publicly stated that Russia would not accept the expansion of NATO to include Ukraine and Georgia and, unlike previous NATO expansions, this would be met with sanctions.<sup>39</sup> In a meeting with President George Bush, Putin reportedly "warned that if Georgia and Ukraine moved toward NATO membership, Russia might respond by recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia's secession from Georgia and by instigating a partition of Ukraine."<sup>40</sup> He also reportedly threatened to take military measures in response.<sup>41</sup>

That Moscow was preparing for a war was apparent by the sequence of events leading to the 2008 outbreak of open conflict. Pavel Felgenhauer, who predicted in advance the August 2008 war, stated that the war was "prepared long ago," exercised a month before the war broke out, and "would have happened regardless of what the Georgians did."<sup>42</sup> Former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, Steven Pifer, has stated that Russia's decision to go to war may have been encouraged by NATO's failure in 2008 to go forward with the admission of Georgia and Ukraine to NATO.<sup>43</sup>

Moscow undertook a graduated program of reinforcement of the North Caucasus Military district, increased exercises, and rail and other road construction to give Moscow a direct route into Georgia.<sup>44</sup> It also appears to have maneuvered the impatient Georgian government into a situation that could later be claimed as instigating a war against so-called Russian citizens in August 2008.<sup>45</sup> Moscow's forces were not ready for the Georgian offensive on August 7-8, 2008, probably because it came sooner than anticipated and earlier planning proved inadequate. However, there is little doubt that Moscow planned and initiated this war. As noted Russian commentator Anton Lavrov writes:

Russia, meanwhile, was well aware of the Georgian plans for an attack against South Ossetia. The only crucial detail it did not know was the precise date of the operation. The political decision to protect the vulnerable republic in the event of a Georgian offensive

was therefore made well in advance. There was a clear possibility of the entire South Ossetian territory being occupied within days: its territory was small, its armed forces weak, and its capital very vulnerable, being located right on the border with Georgia. The large Georgian enclaves with the republic were another factor in Georgia's favor. The Russian military command therefore made certain preparations so as to be able to come to the aid of South Ossetia as soon as possible once the Georgian offensive began.<sup>46</sup>

Although Russia's military performance was quite poor, it quickly overwhelmed the Georgian forces—validating its strategy of using the ethnic card and the orchestration of combined military and non-military pressures to assert itself, undo Western policies, augment the territory under its control, and strive to revise the post-Cold War territorial settlement. Immediately after this war, Moscow launched a major military reform effort, the fruits of which can now be seen in Ukraine.<sup>47</sup>

To date, Moscow has all but taken over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and incorporated them into Russia. Pavel Felgenhauer has stated that a 2013 Russian military exercise, supposedly related to protecting the Olympics, was actually “connected to a possible large-scale regional conflict in the Caucasus, which may begin as a conflict between Russia and Georgia...”<sup>48</sup> During the summer of 2015, Russian forces unilaterally annexed more Georgian territory—apparently to threaten pipelines that connect Georgia to the West.<sup>49</sup>

### **Ukraine: Russia Refines Its Tactics, 2005-2014**

Moscow's aggression against Ukraine has its roots in the war with Georgia. That earlier war confirmed that Moscow could advance its agenda against the West in the CIS by using force in combination with other levers of power in its arsenal, that the West would not intervene, that the costs of such warfare were bearable even if it was preferable not to use force, and that Moscow could play the ethnic card of claiming to protect Russian citizens, foreign citizens of Russian ethnic origin, or Russian language speakers.

Russian planning to subordinate Ukraine appears to have begun almost a decade before the actual Russian attack in 2014—once the effort to subvert Ukraine's 2004 presidential election failed, triggering the Orange Revolution.<sup>50</sup> These events hardened the Russian leadership's convictions that the West was deliberately engineering such color revolutions abroad to destroy Russia's prospects of recovering as a great power and, therefore, that these revolutions had to be suppressed. Following the 2008 war with Georgia, Russia pursued major reforms of its armed forces and the enhancement of Russian capabilities, including innovative tactical, operational, and strategic-military concepts for conflict. Conflict in Ukraine is neither the first nor likely the last scenario in what promises to be a long, drawn-out multi-dimensional conflict between Russia and the West.<sup>51</sup>

Russian military reforms implemented immediately after war with Georgia made its army much more fit for short notice combat, particularly on the periphery of Russia, and provided Moscow with conventional superiority on those peripheries, including the Baltic and now the Black Sea.<sup>52</sup> Moscow also reportedly reformed and increased its types of Special Forces to carry out operations on the periphery.<sup>53</sup> Predictably, these military capabilities turned up in conjunction with the war in Ukraine.

Moscow also redoubled its claim to the right to protect Russians by force in the aforementioned legislation of 2009: justification for territorial expansion and the use of force to defend ethnic Russians or Russian speakers was firmly in the lexicon of Russian leaders in the 2014 annexation of Crimea and invasion of the Donbass.<sup>54</sup>

The Russian program to undermine the integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine accelerated and intensified after 2008, when the Ukrainian government led by Viktor Yushchenko vocally supported Georgia in the war with Russia. Moscow's anger immediately manifested itself in a massive expansion of propaganda that the West was behind the so-called color revolutions and was trying to undermine Russia's return to great power status. Repression at home intensified as did the search for new instruments, in addition to military measures, with which to teach Ukraine (and all neighbors) a lesson.

The energy crises between Russia and Ukraine, in which Moscow turned off the gas at the start of both 2006 and 2009, reflected Putin's determination to punish Yushchenko for surviving, winning, and defying Moscow through his policies, and then supporting Georgia in 2008. The fact of early strategic planning for what became the annexation of Crimea and invasion of the Donbass does not mean that war was Russia's preferred option; it was, however, early considered a possible contingency.

Moscow has never come to terms with Ukraine's independence and sovereignty. Disputes over control of Crimea and the Russian Black Sea Fleet began immediately upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union.<sup>55</sup> The initial idea of invading Ukraine to keep it in the Soviet Union apparently came from Gorbachev's staff in the fall of 1991.<sup>56</sup> Putin frequently has stated publicly that Russia and Ukraine are one people, i.e., Ukraine has no independent existence outside Russia. At the Bucharest NATO summit in 2008, he reportedly warned President Bush, "Do you understand, George, that Ukraine is not even a state!"<sup>57</sup> Putin further claimed that most of its territory was a Russian gift in the 1950s. Furthermore, he reportedly added, if Ukraine did enter NATO, Russia would then dismember Ukraine and graft its parts onto Russia. Thus Ukraine would cease to exist as a state.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, in 2008 Putin threatened Ukraine by identifying it as a prospective Russian nuclear target should it join NATO or host elements of U.S. missile defenses.<sup>59</sup>

By 2005, non-military moves toward the subversion, if not destruction, of Ukraine's independence, integrity and sovereignty had begun. Specifically, Moscow reactivated its support for Crimean independence movements from Ukraine, began a systematic program of informational takeover of Crimea so that its largely ethnic Russian population would have no source of information other than Russian media, intensified efforts to influence Ukrainian politics through energy and other connections, and launched major energy wars against Ukraine in 2006 and 2009 to isolate it from Europe and, if possible, take over domestic distribution networks there. These moves complemented non-military efforts to set Crimea up for "secession."<sup>60</sup>

Russian intelligence penetration of Ukraine's security services also reportedly intensified around this time.<sup>61</sup> And, in 2010, as a result of Russian pressure, Moscow secured a treaty giving it control over the naval base at Sevastopol in Crimea through 2042.<sup>62</sup>

In 2005, Moscow also apparently started recruiting Ukrainians (as well as Russians residing in the Baltic states) to its youth camps. This recruitment was part of a larger Russian effort to set



up youth organizations loyal to Russia to help prevent an outbreak of color revolutions in Russia as occurred in Georgia and Ukraine. Recruitment of foreign youth, including Russians from the diaspora, is part of Putin's domestic youth policy dating back to 2004-2005; it reflects his efforts to create a supportive cadre abroad by using ethnic Russian activists. These activities reportedly continue to the present.<sup>63</sup>

Concurrent with these economic, informational, and political activities, other political and military pressures were added to Russian policy vis-à-vis Ukraine. In 2006, Putin offered Ukraine unsolicited security guarantees in return for permanently stationing the Black Sea Fleet on its territory, a superfluous but ominous gesture since Russia had already guaranteed Ukraine's security through the Tashkent treaty of 1992 and the 1994 Budapest Memorandum to denuclearize Ukraine.<sup>64</sup> Putin hinted that Ukrainian resistance to Russian limits on its freedom of action might encounter a Russian backed "Kosovo-like" scenario of a nationalist uprising in Crimea to which Russia could not remain indifferent.<sup>65</sup> Defense correspondent, Reuben Johnson, wrote:

Moscow has the political and covert action means to create in the Crimea the very type of situations against which Putin is offering to "protect" Ukraine if the Russian Fleet's presence is extended. Thus far such means have been shown to include inflammatory visits and speeches by Russian Duma deputies in the Crimea, challenges to Ukraine's control of Tuzla Island in the Kerch Strait, the fanning of "anti-NATO" – in fact anti-American – protests by Russian groups in connection with planned military exercises and artificial Russian-Tatar tensions on the peninsula.<sup>66</sup>

In short, Russian military, economic, informational, ideological, and other forms of penetration of the Crimea in anticipation of an overall nullification of Ukraine's sovereignty over the area were long-standing and well known.<sup>67</sup>

Further deterioration of relations became evident when, on August 11, 2009, President Medvedev published an open letter lambasting Ukraine's policies, and announcing that Russia would withhold sending its new ambassador to Ukraine. Medvedev also called upon the Ukrainian people to elect a new pro-Russian president.<sup>68</sup> Medvedev specifically charged that:

The leadership in Kiev took an openly anti-Russian stand following the military attack launched by the Saakashvili regime against South Ossetia. Ukrainian weapons were used to kill civilians and Russian peacekeepers. Russia continues to experience problems caused by a policy aimed at obstructing the operations of its Black Sea Fleet, and this on a daily basis and in violation of the basic agreements between our countries. Sadly, the campaign continues to oust the Russian language from the Ukrainian media, the education, culture and science. The Ukrainian leadership's outwardly smooth-flowing rhetoric fits ill with the overt distortion of complex and difficult episodes in our common history, the tragic events of the great famine in the Soviet Union, and an interpretation of the Great Patriotic War as some kind of confrontation between two totalitarian systems.

Our economic relations are in a somewhat better situation and are developing, but we have not yet succeeded in tapping their full potential. Again, the problem is that Russian companies frequently face open resistance from the Ukrainian authorities. Bypassing

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Russia, Ukraine's political leaders do deals with the European Union on supplying gas—gas from Russia—and sign a document that completely contradicts the Russian-Ukrainian agreements reached in January this year.<sup>69</sup>

Medvedev's statement reiterated Putin's assessment of Ukraine's sovereignty and the sovereignty of other CIS governments. It made clear that what angered Russia was the idea that Ukraine might exercise the prerogatives of an independent state and demand that Russia not interfere in its politics and elections. Implicitly, Russia warned that if Ukraine is not at least neutral vis-à-vis the West, it would come under Russian assault.<sup>70</sup>

The 2010 election of Viktor Yanukovich gave Russia a Ukrainian leader susceptible to Moscow's persuasions. In the mistaken belief that Russian pressure would subsequently ease, as noted above, Yanukovich signed a new treaty with Russia in 2010 giving Moscow control over the naval base at Sevastopol through 2042 and a favorable energy deal. Moscow got what it wanted, a government in Ukraine that essentially refused to join the West and gave Moscow greater license in Crimea.

By 2013, Ukraine's crisis of governance was in full swing as it attempted to navigate between signing an Association Agreement with the EU and Russian pressure. Russia successfully pressured Ukraine to suspend signature of an agreement with the EU via the threat of crippling trade sanctions.<sup>71</sup> Moscow intensified its ongoing operations throughout Ukraine and outlined a policy of coercing and influencing key sectors of the Ukrainian population and government. An apparently leaked Russian government paper in August 2013 laid out:

A plan for achieving three key goals: preventing Ukraine from signing an EU Association Agreement, creating an "influential network" of pro-Russian organizations capable of preventing the government from "undertaking actions that are not beneficial for Russia," and bringing Ukraine into the Russia-led Eurasian Customs Union and Single Economic Space by 2015.<sup>72</sup>

This document presented a systematic plan for coercing and influencing key sectors and threatening economic elites with sanctions, including trade wars, even as it called for systematic large-scale propaganda efforts to influence Ukrainian opinion.<sup>73</sup> This document and the policies it advocated embodied the economic-political-informational side of Russian policy. Simultaneously, the military concept for a future operation against Ukraine was being formulated.

In 2013, Chief of the General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov published a seminal article outlining the kind of war that Moscow attributed to the West, but would also plan to fight. Gerasimov highlighted the advent of a new kind of war that involved "nonmilitary methods to achieve political and strategic goals." Indeed, military force per se played a limited, if necessary, and potentially decisive role.

The emphasis in methods of struggle is shifting toward widespread use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other nonmilitary measures, implemented through the involvement of the protest potential of the population. All this is supplemented by covert military measures, including implementation of measures by information struggle and the actions of special operations forces. Overt use of force, often under the guise of

peacekeeping and crisis management occurs only at a certain stage, primarily to achieve definitive success in the conflict.<sup>74</sup>

Gerasimov's thesis reliably summarized Russian strategy in the so-called "near abroad" and accurately reflected the nature of Moscow's impending war with Ukraine. This was an "opening shot" in the effort to define a new comprehensive "whole of government" strategy for Russia. As Gerasimov said in 2014, a "comprehensive" strategy has "been planned... based on political-diplomatic and foreign economic measures, which are closely interrelated with military, informational, and others." These measures, according to Gerasimov, are aimed at "persuading potential aggressors that any forms of pressure on the Russian Federation and allies have no prospects."<sup>75</sup>

Under severe Russian pressure, Yanukovich backed away from the EU agreement.<sup>76</sup> In doing so, he triggered the eruption of revolutionary demonstrations in Ukraine known as the Euro-Maidan (Euro Square), which began in November 2013. Throughout this period, Moscow reportedly kept the pressure on Yanukovich to intensify the use of repression, but his efforts to use force were ineffective, indecisive and, ultimately, backfired. Moscow responded by shifting into high gear to plan the direct takeover of Crimea.

By February 2014, Moscow had assembled many of the cards it would play through the systematic use of economic sanctions, preferences, manipulation of trade with Ukraine, particularly involving energy; it also had honed its military instrument. By February, in advance of Yanukovich's departure on February 22, the operation had begun. Russia indirectly acknowledged this by striking medals awarded to Russian soldiers who participated in Crimea and Donbass operations with an inscription that operations began on February 20, 2014—which indicates that the medals were awarded for actions taken prior to the start of armed conflict.<sup>77</sup> Putin's contention that he launched the operation on February 22 just *after* Yanukovich's departure appears to be false.<sup>78</sup>

Russia's Crimean and Donbass actions can be understood in the light of these preparations and subsequent operations. They represent the coordinated work of many, if not all, of the disparate parts of the Russian state apparatus, and reflect prior planning.<sup>79</sup> The GRU (Russian military intelligence) forces, followed by Airborne and Naval Infantry and Special Operations Forces, reportedly took the lead in Crimea, while in the Donbass the Federal Security Service (FSB) and Russian military personnel from Moscow's multiple military formations took the lead.<sup>80</sup> Moscow's media and "trolls" simultaneously mounted a sustained barrage of attacks in the Russian and international media against the allegedly fascist, anti-Semitic junta in Kiev.

Ukraine has become something of a "live-fire exercise" for the Putin leadership.<sup>81</sup> It is a training ground wherein the elements of contemporary "hybrid" warfare were/are developed, monitored, and refined for potential further use. Those elements include playing the ethnic card and the invocation of Russia's right and duty to intervene coercively and forcefully on behalf of supposedly endangered ethnic Russians or Russian speakers. Ukraine also appears to be a testing ground for a long-term, multi-dimensional war of attrition in multiple theaters against the West. The Putin leadership confronts the West with a comprehensive, adaptable and mature strategy, not simply strategic improvisation.

## Emerging Military Operations in Syria

In September 2015, Russia became increasingly involved militarily in Syria in direct support of the Assad regime, including reported ground combat.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, Israel has stated publicly that Russia is sending troops into Syria.<sup>83</sup> Moscow apparently is building a military air base and deploying long-range strike aircraft, close air support aircraft and air-dominance fighter aircraft.<sup>84</sup> In addition, Russia reportedly is building a base for 1,000 ground force troops near the existing Russian naval supply base.<sup>85</sup> Its troops also reportedly will man advanced Russian SA-22 surface-to-air missiles being sold to Syria.<sup>86</sup> These weapons are obviously not aimed at ISIS—which has no aircraft. TASS, the main official Russian news agency, has reported that Secretary of State John Kerry raised the issue of Russian involvement in Syria with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, but Lavrov apparently was unwilling to discuss the matter.<sup>87</sup> The State Department has said that Kerry told Lavrov that, “if such reports were accurate, these actions could further escalate the conflict, lead to greater loss of innocent life, increase refugee flows and risk confrontation with the anti-ISIL coalition operating in Syria.”<sup>88</sup>

Russian actions in Syria risk a confrontation between U.S. and/or allied forces and Russian forces either on land or in the air. Indeed, Lavrov has warned the United States against “unintended incidents.”<sup>89</sup> Russian pilots recently “buzzed” the U.S. aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan in the Mediterranean Sea, and four armed U.S. F/A-18 Hornets were scrambled to respond.<sup>90</sup>

At this time, eighty percent of Russian air strikes reportedly have not been targeted against ISIS, but rather against anti-Assad insurgents,<sup>91</sup> and high-intensity Russian bombing has mainly used “dumb bombs” which can produce considerable collateral damage.<sup>92</sup> Russian aircraft reportedly have entered Turkish air space.<sup>93</sup> In addition, the Russian use of conventionally-armed but nuclear-capable *Kalibr* cruise missiles against targets in Syria appears to be a message to the U.S.<sup>94</sup>

Russia appears to be supporting a former Soviet client state and solidifying an anti-U.S. alliance with Iran.<sup>95</sup> Moscow may hope that demonstrating a willingness to use force and accept casualties will influence European attitudes concerning ending sanctions against Russia over Ukraine,<sup>96</sup> although Russian involvement in Syria will increase the already considerable strain of the Ukrainian conflict on the Russian economy. Simultaneously, Moscow also is trying to minimize internal domestic perceptions of its involvement in Syria, presumably because of concern that this intervention ultimately could prove to be unpopular.<sup>97</sup>

Alexander Golts has suggested that Putin’s motive in Syria relates to diverting attention from the Ukraine.<sup>98</sup> Pavel Felgenhauer has written that, “Putin seeks a new world order, based on an anti-Islamic State (anti-terrorist) ‘broad coalition’ that would include the United States and other Western countries. For Putin, an overall understanding founded on facing a common enemy must include the termination of sanctions imposed by Western countries on Russia for the annexation of Crimea and engagement in fighting in eastern Ukraine.”<sup>99</sup>

More broadly, reports Aleksei Malashenko of the Carnegie Moscow Center, “Putin dreams of the restoration of Russian power everywhere, not just in the former Soviet space. The activity in Syria and around Syria means Russia is able to come back to the Middle East, not as a superpower, but as something that can balance the power of the West and the United States.”<sup>100</sup> If so, the

geographical arena in which Russia seeks to play a pivotal role, and in which Putin will act militarily, is not limited to former Soviet republics and members of the Warsaw Pact. A recent discussion of Syria in the Russian-state sponsored news service, *Sputnik International*, certainly suggests that this broader Russian goal underlies Russia's military intervention in Syria. It quotes with approval the explanation that in the Middle East, "Putin has sought to fill the vacuum left by the United States, and is influencing every country which has lost American support, in whole or in part."<sup>101</sup> Commentary from a "think tank" sponsored by the Russian Foreign Ministry adds that, "the decision to intervene in Syria allows us to make several conclusions about Russian foreign policy beyond the Middle East. The most important of them is that Moscow is not afraid of making bold decisions." And, "Moscow's courage includes its military capabilities and its readiness to use them."<sup>102</sup> This situation continues to evolve, but it is clear at this point that Putin sees unprecedented license to move militarily.

### **Russian Military Operations and Lessons Learned**

As of today, Ukraine remains a paradigmatic example of Russian hybrid warfare tactics, which may be repeated elsewhere. Military operations are ongoing and escalating.<sup>103</sup> In late August 2015, Ukraine stated that 35,000 Russian troops had entered Donbass.<sup>104</sup> By August 2015, Putin's aggression had cost the Ukrainian Army 2,100 dead and 7,020 wounded.<sup>105</sup> And, according to a possibly inadvertent Russian report, 2,000 Russian troops have been killed in fighting in Eastern Ukraine while reportedly 3,200 have been wounded.<sup>106</sup> In February 2015, German intelligence reportedly estimated the civilian death toll at 50,000.<sup>107</sup> Russia announced in August 2015 that it had absorbed one million refugees from the war.<sup>108</sup>

Moscow has moved from the outright annexation of Crimea by military means, to its new accords with Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, which presage a gradual, de facto annexation. From Georgia to Ukraine, Russia has steadily improved its capability for executing this kind of war. Moscow, however, clearly has miscalculated popular support and rebel capability in the Donbass and has thus been obliged to invest much more directly there and has incurred Western sanctions. Despite this setback, Russia continues to speak and act belligerently, thereby increasing the possibility of further confrontation and escalation of conflict.

These case studies, including Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, demonstrate a consistent defining and driving goal of the Putin regime. Indeed, recognition of this reality is crucial to an understanding of contemporary Russian goals and strategy. Following are fundamental elements of Russian expansionism:

- Playing the Russian ethnic card;
- Exploitation of ethnic conflicts to gain a military foothold in targeted countries;
- Use of conventional military forces to invade and partition targeted areas;
- Use of nuclear first-use threats to prevent forceful Western opposition;
- Employment of economic sanctions and economic warfare on trade to coerce targeted states;
- Creation of energy dependencies and corruption of energy and other economic sectors;
- Intelligence penetration and subversion of key security and other sectors; and,
- Attempts to take over local media.

Post-2008 Russian military reforms apparently have succeeded in their primary purpose of generating a force that can win limited wars on Russia's peripheries, provide coercive nuclear threats, and maintain a significant military superiority along its frontier with smaller neighbors. This trend, if unopposed, will give Russia flexible options for limited wars and/or coercion in its neighborhood.<sup>109</sup>

## Nuclear Coercion

There are reports by former U.S. senior officials that Russia put its nuclear forces on alert during the 2008 war with Georgia.<sup>110</sup> Putin publicly stated that Russia was prepared for a nuclear alert when he launched the Crimean operation in February 2014. Since then, Russian officials repeatedly have stated that because Crimea is now part of Russia, Moscow has the right to station nuclear weapons there.<sup>111</sup> Clearly, Russia aims to prevent NATO from even contemplating a military response in this theater. After taking Ukrainian territories, Russian military leaders have publicly raised the issue of a limited Russian nuclear escalation should NATO intervene in response to Russian aggression in the Crimea.<sup>112</sup>

Russia appears to be building a spectrum of nuclear capabilities that will provide it with a range of flexible nuclear options throughout the entire European theater from the Arctic to the Black Sea.<sup>113</sup> Beyond those potential operational vistas, moreover, the record of nuclear rhetoric, exercises, and signaling since the onset of the Ukrainian crisis demonstrates that Moscow regards its nuclear weapons as essential elements of its overall strategy and as a screen behind which it can deploy its conventional and non-military assets in a synchronized strategy to transform the post-Cold War order.

Subsequent chapters will examine how Russian threats, including nuclear threats, its robust nuclear force modernization program, and its pattern of violating arms control agreements—particularly the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty—appear to be integral elements in the broad Russian grand strategy identified in Chapter One and demonstrated here in Chapter Two.

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<sup>9</sup> Alexander Golts, "The Failure of Realpolitik," *The Moscow Times*, August 12, 2008, available at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/1016/42/369738.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> "Lavrov: 'My Rabotayem Nad Tem, Chtobyi Dat' Grazhdanstvo RF Zhitelyam Byveshego SSSR," *Narodnye Novosti*, July 15, 2015, available at <http://nation-news.ru/2015-07-15/127005-lavrov-myi-rabotaem-nad-tem-chtobyi-dat-grazhdanstvo-rf-zhitelyam-byivshego-sssr/>.

<sup>11</sup> "New Citizenship Shortcut for Russian-speakers of Soviet, Imperial Ancestry," *RT*, April 21, 2014, available at <http://www.rt.com/politics/russian-citizenship-ancestors-language-764/>.

<sup>12</sup> Yuri E. Fedorov, *Medvedev's Amendments to the Law on Defence: The Consequences For Europe* (Helsinki, Finland: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Briefing Paper No. 47, November 2009, available at [http://www.fii.fi/en/publication/94/medvedev\\_s\\_amendments\\_to\\_the\\_law\\_on\\_defence/](http://www.fii.fi/en/publication/94/medvedev_s_amendments_to_the_law_on_defence/).

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## Chapter 3. Russian Expressions of Hostility

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### Introduction

Russia's foreign and defense policies are driven by its perception of world events and threats to its security. Russia's attitudes toward the West reflect a combination of Soviet-era hostility, lingering resentment and a desire to reassert its status as a great power in global affairs—consistent with the goals and objectives of Russia's foreign policy described in Chapter One. As Moscow's public posturing has become increasingly anti-American and anti-Western, its foreign and defense policies have become more threatening. This growing hostility toward the West, including Russia's military posturing toward Japan, increases the potential for conflict.

The Russian worldview appears to be based on the premise that the United States seeks to: 1) destroy Russia; 2) dismember it; and 3) steal its natural resources, and that the United States may attack at any time.<sup>1</sup> This alleged Western hostility serves as a justification for current Russian aggression against its neighbors and the suppression of democracy within Russia itself. It is symptomatic of a Russian worldview that often is characterized as paranoid. As well-known Russian journalist Alexander Golts has observed, "Fifty years from now historians will no doubt wonder why President Vladimir Putin was preparing to use force against his own people at a time when he enjoyed a nearly 90 percent approval rating."<sup>2</sup>

In January 2011, the chairman of the State Duma's International Affairs Committee, Konstantin Kosachev, wrote that Russian military strategists believe that the chief (and maybe the only) threat to Russia, as in Soviet times, is posed by a possible U.S. nuclear strike.<sup>3</sup>

Senior Russian leaders often express their perceptions of a West that is nefarious and hostile toward Russia. Such expressions likely appear wholly unrealistic to knowledgeable Western audiences, but they are the norm among Russian civilian and military leaders, with many speaking openly of a major war over the country's natural resources.<sup>4</sup> For example, in October 2014, the Secretary of the Russian National Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, accused the U.S. of trying to create a sphere of influence in the Black Sea area, the Caucasus, and the Caspian area, arguing that "American strategists" were bent on "completely destroying the governance system and then dismembering our country."<sup>5</sup> Patrushev stated that the U.S. believes Russian "natural resources are distributed unfairly and that other states should have free access to them" and, to this end, the United States was creating a "collation...to support relevant claims on our country in the future."<sup>6</sup> He also declared that NATO military exercises in response to Russian aggression in Ukraine and threats to Russia's neighbors "look more like provocations" than military maneuvers.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Russia blames the Ukraine situation on the U.S, arguing that Kiev is a U.S. puppet.

Moscow sees pro-democracy movements in Russia and the former Soviet republics as a direct threat to Russian national security, attributes them to Western intelligence organizations, and is prepared to oppose them by force.<sup>8</sup> Again, to quote Patrushev: "For the past quarter of a century this activity has been directed towards completely separating Ukraine and the other republics of the former USSR from Russia and totally reformatting the post-Soviet space to suit American

interests. The conditions and pretexts were created for colour revolutions, supported by generous state funding.”<sup>9</sup>

In November 2014, President Putin declared that a color revolution in Russia must be prevented.<sup>10</sup> Earlier this year, in comments that the *Washington Post* characterized as reflecting “deep-seated paranoia,”<sup>11</sup> he stated, “Western special services continue their attempts at using public, nongovernmental and politicized organizations to pursue their own objectives, primarily to discredit the authorities and destabilize the internal situation in Russia. They are already planning their actions for the upcoming election campaigns of 2016-18.”<sup>12</sup> In 2014, Russian Defense Minister and General of the Army Sergei Shoigu said, “Color revolutions are increasingly taking on the form of warfare and are developed according to the rules of warcraft.”<sup>13</sup> Dr. Dmitry Gorenburg, an expert on Russia at Harvard University, has suggested, “Perhaps the Kremlin thinks that U.S. policy is aimed at destabilizing opposing regimes because such activities are a standard part of their own policy toolkit.”<sup>14</sup>

Russia seeks to reestablish the position, power and centralized repressive authority of the past Soviet state in order to achieve a “gathering of Russian people,” by force if necessary, and seeks the creation of a Eurasian alliance dominated by Moscow.<sup>15</sup> According to respected Russian journalist Alexander Golts, Putin’s world is one “...of 19th century Realpolitik, when contradictions between ‘major powers’ were resolved with the aid of warfare.”<sup>16</sup> Correspondingly, there is concern, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, about the possibility of a Russian attack.<sup>17</sup> Putin has been quoted as saying, “If I wanted, Russian troops could not only be in Kiev in two days, but in Riga, Vilnius, Tallinn, Warsaw or Bucharest, too.”<sup>18</sup> (Tellingly, five of these are capitals of NATO countries.) In the context of its continued war against Ukraine, Russia is applying threats and pressure not only against vulnerable NATO states, but against neutral countries like Sweden and Finland. This saber rattling is taken seriously by NATO’s senior military leadership. For example, Deputy NATO Commander Lieutenant General Sir Adrian Bradshaw has expressed concern about the possibility of a rapid Russian assault on smaller NATO states backed by Russian nuclear threats against the alliance if it comes to their aid.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Soviet Legacy and Russian Hostility**

Legacy Soviet attitudes toward the West have always been a major factor in Russian foreign and defense policy.<sup>20</sup> While the communist ideology is gone, the hostility it spawned toward the West continues. Russia’s immediate post-Cold War public line expressed by then-President Boris Yeltsin that Russia had no enemies was replaced by the Putin view that the U.S., NATO and Japan are Russia’s enemies and that Russia is preparing to fight them. Russian hostility toward the U.S. and NATO was made increasingly clear in the 2010 and 2014 versions of the *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*.<sup>21</sup>

Even when U.S.-Russian relations appeared to have improved early in the George W. Bush administration, legacy Soviet hostility simmered. Putin blamed the West for the 2004 Beslan terrorist atrocity that killed hundreds of schoolchildren and other hostages. He said, “Some want to cut off a juicy morsel from us while others are helping them. They are helping because they believe that, as one of the world’s major nuclear powers, Russia is still posing a threat to someone, and therefore this threat must be removed. And terrorism is, of course, only a tool for achieving these goals.”<sup>22</sup> In 2006, Putin compared the U.S. to a ravenous wolf.<sup>23</sup>

Russian hostility toward the West has long been reflected in official statements about large-scale war and even nuclear war. Since 2007, senior Russian generals have made repeated nuclear threats, statements about border nuclear wars, nuclear wars over natural resources or the Arctic Ocean's energy resources, as well as countless expressions against U.S. missile defenses.<sup>24</sup> In 2011, Chief of the General Staff General Nikolai Makarov stated, "In certain conditions, I do not rule out local and regional armed conflicts developing into a large-scale war, including using nuclear weapons."<sup>25</sup> In 2013, Chief of the General Staff General of the Army Valeriy Gerasimov spoke about nuclear war resulting from the struggle for fuel and energy and manpower resources, markets for goods, the natural resources of the Arctic Ocean, and "living space."<sup>26</sup> In fact, Russia is now claiming a vast expanse of the Arctic Ocean and is reactivating Soviet-era Arctic military bases to enforce this claim.<sup>27</sup> Well-known Russian journalist Pavel Felgenhauer once observed, "...our superiors are potentially ready to burn all of us in nuclear fire because of disputes over ice, rocks or South Ossetia [a province of Georgia occupied by Russia.]"<sup>28</sup>

In 2014-2015, Russian hostility toward the West reached extraordinary levels with Russia preparing to fight on all fronts, but particularly against the U.S. and NATO.<sup>29</sup> In 2014, President Putin stated that NATO was "spreading like a cancerous tumor" and, when asked about the NATO threat to Russia, he said, "We'll strangle all of them ourselves! Why are you so afraid?"<sup>30</sup> As discussed below, Russian threats, provocative bomber flights, and military exercises have reached unprecedented levels.

In Asia, Russian-Japanese relations have deteriorated because of aggressive Russian threats and military activities. Russia has displayed increasing hostility toward Japan in recent years, though not on the same scale as toward the United States and NATO. In 2013, the Japanese Defense Ministry reported that Russia had increased military deployments on the Kuril Islands (some of which are claimed by Japan) and was conducting an increased number of military exercises near Japan.<sup>31</sup> The Kuril Islands, claimed by Russia, have become a significant security issue between Russia and Japan, which considers the southernmost Kurils as its "Northern Territories." In 2013, the *Moscow Times* reported that "Japan scrambled four fighter jets to intercept two Russian fighters it said invaded Japanese airspace near Russia's Kuril Islands...as Japan celebrated a national day of commemoration calling for the disputed archipelago seized in World War II to return to the Japanese."<sup>32</sup> In 2014, Russia announced that it would deploy 120 combat vehicles to the Kuril Islands, while acknowledging that since 2011 it had deployed 350 modern military vehicles to these Islands.<sup>33</sup> Russia also indicated that it would build 150 military facilities on the Islands by 2016.<sup>34</sup> In June 2015, Russia said it had accelerated military construction on the Kuril Islands, including on Iturup, one of the islands claimed by Japan.<sup>35</sup>

## **An Anti-Western Nuclear Doctrine**

Contemporary Russian nuclear doctrine reportedly was developed mainly by Vladimir Putin when he was Secretary of the Russian National Security Council and he signed it into law when he was acting Russian President in 2000.<sup>36</sup> This doctrine reflects strong hostility to the West and allows for the first use of nuclear weapons in conventional wars. The details of this doctrine are discussed in the next chapter, but it is important to underscore that the doctrine is deliberately threatening to the West—apparently to influence Western policy decisions on a variety of issues, the most important of which relates to Russia's desire for dominance in Europe.



In 1999, Colonel General (later General of the Army) Vladimir Yakovlov, then-Commander of the Strategic Missile Troops, noted: “Russia, for objective reasons, is forced to lower the threshold for using nuclear weapons, extend the nuclear deterrence to small-scale conflicts and openly warn potential opponents about this.”<sup>37</sup> He further said, “The need for Russia’s orientation toward expanded nuclear deterrence, which means including not only nuclear and wide-scale conventional wars, but also regional and even local military conflicts [is] in the sphere of interests of the RVSN [the Russian ICBM force] and Strategic Nuclear Forces as a whole...”<sup>38</sup>

Aleksei Arbatov, then-Deputy Chairman of the Russian Duma Defense Committee, and Duma Deputy Petr Romashkin suggested that under Putin’s nuclear doctrine, Russian first use of nuclear weapons would be appropriate in response to contingencies like NATO’s past military action in Kosovo.<sup>39</sup> Then-Russian Atomic Energy Minister Viktor Mikhaylov reportedly urged the development of precision low yield nuclear weapons because of their enhanced credibility to “deter NATO expansion, the attacks on Iraq, the war in the Balkans...”<sup>40</sup> Thus, a key driver behind Putin’s nuclear doctrine was not only the desire to deter attack on Russia—which previous Russian nuclear doctrinal formulations certainly did—but to return Russia to superpower status by employing the threat of nuclear strikes, including nuclear weapons use in circumstances where no Western nation would likely consider using nuclear weapons. This expanded formulation appears to have been integrated into Russian defense planning.

In December 2009, Lieutenant General Andrey Shvaychenko, then-Commander of the Russian Strategic Missile Troops, described the function of his nuclear forces in conventional war this way: “In a conventional war, they ensure that the opponent is forced to cease hostilities, on advantageous conditions for Russia, by means of single or multiple preventive strikes against the aggressors’ most important facilities.”<sup>41</sup> This is what Russia refers to as nuclear “de-escalation” of a conflict, a concept which Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work and Admiral James Winnefeld, then-Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have recently characterized as “playing with fire.”<sup>42</sup>

The Putin nuclear first-use doctrine was announced at a time when no other European state believed there was a serious possibility of a major European war, much less a nuclear war. The declassification of the Warsaw Pact war plan by several former Warsaw Pact states confirmed that Putin’s nuclear doctrine was actually an evolution of the earlier Soviet nuclear doctrine, which reportedly allowed for the large-scale first use of nuclear weapons in a major conventional war.<sup>43</sup>

The implications of Russia’s nuclear first-use doctrine were articulated in July 2014 when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov made an implied nuclear threat against NATO over Crimea. He said, “If it comes to aggression against Russian territory, which Crimea and Sevastopol are parts of, I would not advise anyone to do this....We have the doctrine of national security, and it very clearly regulates the actions, which will be taken in this case.”<sup>44</sup> Minister Lavrov’s statement is consistent with Russia’s doctrine, which the state-run *RT* (formerly *Russia Today*) and the independent *Interfax* news agencies both report allows for nuclear weapons first use “...if the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation are under threat.”<sup>45</sup> (Emphasis in the original). This is a much more permissive formulation than the public version of the doctrine. And as Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Rogozin stated, if Russia were subject to a conventional

attack, “we will certainly resort to using nuclear weapons in certain situations to defend our territory and state interests.”<sup>46</sup> (Emphasis in the original).

Russian nuclear doctrine does not focus explicitly on Japan, probably because Japan has very limited offensive capabilities. In addition, it is not in Russia’s interest to scare Japan, a country with the third largest economy in the world, into developing or acquiring its own nuclear weapons. Nonetheless, Russia’s nuclear doctrine envisions the first use of nuclear weapons when the security of the Russian Federation is perceived to be at risk—an ambiguous construct that could apply to Japan given Japanese claims on Kuril Islands and Japan’s mutual security treaty with the United States.

### **Russian Nuclear Sabre-Rattling: A Tool of Military and Political Intimidation**

Russia employs nuclear threats not only to highlight its significant military capability, but to buttress its political clout against the West. Since Russia today likely lacks the economic power, the manpower, and conventional military power to defeat NATO in a protracted conventional war, nuclear weapons are seen as the most important tool in the Russian arsenal for advancing both political and military objectives. Nuclear weapons are perceived as able to defeat advanced conventional weapons in wartime, thus offsetting U.S. advantages in these weapons.<sup>47</sup> Russian nuclear threats are a way of advertising this capability. Russia has adopted the view that fear of nuclear war can be exploited to help advance the Russian agenda of creating a sphere of influence over former Soviet and former Warsaw Pact states by coercing them into acceptance of Russian domination and rejection of both Western democracy and integration into the European Union.

In 2007, Russian military and civilian officials began threatening to target nuclear missiles against U.S. missile defense sites located in NATO Europe (several of these threats were made by Putin himself) and these threats have continued to this day. The commander of the Russian ICBM force made the first public nuclear missile threat against Poland and the Czech Republic in the event of a U.S. missile defense deployment.<sup>48</sup> In April 2007, then-Chief of the General Staff General Yury Baluyevski, also threatened to target U.S. missile defense facilities in Europe: “If we see that these facilities pose a threat to Russia, these targets will be included in the lists of our planners—strategic, nuclear or others. The latter is a technicality.”<sup>49</sup> President Putin also made several threats involving the targeting of nuclear missiles against U.S. allies. For example, in a face-to-face meeting with the President of Poland, Putin declared, “If it [European missile defense] appears, we will be forced to respond appropriately—we will have to re-target part of our systems against those missiles.”<sup>50</sup>

In 2009, the press spokesman of the Russian Defense Ministry, Colonel General Anatoly Nogovitsyn threatened Poland with nuclear attack, declaring: “Poland is making itself a target. This is 100 percent certain.” He further noted that Russia’s nuclear doctrine would allow for the use of nuclear weapons “against the allies of countries having nuclear weapons if they in some way help them.”<sup>51</sup> In December 2011, Colonel General Sergei Karakayev, the Commander of the Strategic Missile Troops, said Russian ICBMs can be promptly targeted against elements of the U.S. strategic missile defense system in Europe.<sup>52</sup> In March 2015, Russia’s Ambassador to Denmark, Mikhail Vanin said, “if Denmark joins the American-led missile defense shield....then Danish warships will be targets for Russian nuclear missiles.”<sup>53</sup> In June 2015, Deputy Secretary

of the Russian Security Council, Yevgeny Lukyanov threatened that the Baltic republics would become “targets” if they supported missile defense deployment. In July 2015, Russian Ambassador to Sweden Viktor Tatarintsev threatened a harsh response if Sweden joined NATO. He said, “*Putin pointed out that there will be consequences, that Russia will have to resort to a response of the military kind and re-orientate our troops and missiles.*” (Emphasis in the original)<sup>54</sup> This was followed by a number of Russian targeting threats, including one by Putin concerning the targeting of his “modern attack weapons on the territories from which the threat originates.”<sup>55</sup>

Senior Russian officials have also threatened preemptive nuclear strikes. In 2003, then Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov suggested that Russia had plans for preemptive nuclear strikes.<sup>56</sup> In 2008, General Baluyevski was explicit, stating, “...all our partners must realize that for protection of Russia and its allies if necessary armed forces will be used, including preventively, including with the use of nuclear weapons.”<sup>57</sup> In 2009, Patrushev reiterated this: “It [Russian nuclear doctrine] does not rule out a nuclear strike targeting a potential aggressor, including a preemptive strike, in situations critical to national security.”<sup>58</sup>

During 2014-2015, Russian nuclear threats of various types escalated, causing growing consternation among senior U.S. and NATO officials. In May 2015, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg observed:

...Russia’s recent use of nuclear rhetoric, exercises and operations are deeply troubling, as are concerns regarding its compliance with the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty.... Russia’s nuclear saber-rattling is unjustified, destabilizing and dangerous.... Russian officials announced plans to base modern nuclear-capable missile systems in Kaliningrad. And they claim that Russia has the right to deploy nuclear forces to Crimea. This will fundamentally change the balance of security in Europe.<sup>59</sup>

This view has been echoed by senior U.S. officials. According to Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, “Moscow’s nuclear saber-rattling raises questions about Russia’s commitment to strategic stability and causes us...to wonder whether...they share the profound caution...that world leaders in the nuclear age have shown over decades to the brandishing of nuclear weapons.”<sup>60</sup> Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work and then-Vice Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral James Winnefeld told the House Armed Services Committee the U.S. must deter Russian “escalatory threats.”<sup>61</sup>

### **Nuclear Threats Against the Backdrop of the European Security Crisis of 2014-2015**

The year 2014 was a major turning point in post-Cold War history when Russia invaded and annexed Crimea and engaged in an expanded war in Eastern Ukraine with the objective of extending Russian control and possibly creating a land bridge to Crimea. As noted previously, President Toomas Ilves of Estonia has pointed out, “Everything that has happened since 1989 has been predicated on the fundamental assumption that you don’t change borders by force, and that’s now out the window.”<sup>62</sup>

It was also a turning point in the Russian use of nuclear threats. In 2014 and 2015, Russia injected nuclear weapons into the Ukraine crisis, threatening a nuclear response in the event of a NATO counter attack. As Deputy Secretary of Defense Work has observed, “...senior Russian officials

continue to make irresponsible statements regarding Russia's nuclear forces, and we assess that they are doing it to intimidate our allies and us."<sup>63</sup>

In his August 2014 Yalta speech on Ukraine, Putin referenced Russia's large and growing nuclear capabilities, and warned that NATO should not "mess" with Russia.<sup>64</sup> In September 2014, then-Ukrainian Defense Minister Colonel General Valeriy Heletey said that Russia threatened on several occasions across unofficial channels to use tactical nuclear weapons against Ukraine.<sup>65</sup> In a March 2015 "documentary" marking the one year anniversary of the Russian annexation of Crimea, Putin said he was willing to put Russian nuclear forces on alert during the invasion.<sup>66</sup> As Colonel (ret.) Vladimir Yevseyev, Director of the Center for Social and Political Research wrote, "Putin is saying that under certain conditions, Russia will be ready to use nuclear weapons to defend Crimea."<sup>67</sup>

Putin reportedly has made nuclear threats through unofficial channels over Crimea and the Baltic republics. According to the London *Times*, Russian generals present at a meeting in Germany who said they were speaking for the Russian government indicated that "any military move by the West on Crimea would trigger a Russian response, possibly involving nuclear force. 'The United States should also understand it would also be at risk,'" the generals reportedly said, and the paper noted that "President Putin is using the threat of a nuclear showdown over the Baltic states to force NATO to back away from Russia's border."<sup>68</sup>

The fundamental difference in these statements and past Russian nuclear threats is that Russia is now talking about the first use of nuclear weapons in support of Russian aggression and expansion, not only in response to an attack on Russia. This is an important shift. As Lieutenant General Sir Adrian Bradshaw, Deputy NATO military commander, has noted, Eastern European NATO states face the risk of a Russian conventional attack backed by the threat of nuclear "escalation" which would be used to prevent "re-establishment of territorial integrity."<sup>69</sup>

Such overt manifestations of hostility support the foreign policy goals of restoring Russia's position as a military force to be reckoned with, expanding Russian dominance in Europe, and creating opportunities for dissension within the NATO alliance.

### **Nuclear Bomber Patrols**

In 2007, Putin announced the start of bomber "patrols," stating, "Combat alert has begun today. Twenty strategic missile carriers are taking part in it. The planes that have scrambled will be in the air for 20 hours with refueling and in interaction with the Navy."<sup>70</sup> These patrols continue to this day and Russian nuclear-capable bombers are deliberately being flown into the air defense identification zones of the U.S., Canada, NATO Europe, and Japan.

The intent of these flights is clearly to intimidate.<sup>71</sup> In July 2015, *Sputnik News*, a Russian state-run news agency, stated the Tu-95 heavy bomber "is capable of striking the United States with nuclear bombs," and the purpose of the flights was to "survey the skies around Russian borders reminding everyone that Russia is a power to be reckoned with."<sup>72</sup>

In May 2015, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg declared, "Russia has also significantly increased the scale, number and range of provocative flights by nuclear-capable bombers across

much of the globe. From Japan to Gibraltar. From Crete to California. And from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea.”<sup>73</sup> He revealed that NATO had to intercept Russian military aircraft 400 times in 2014, twice the number that took place in 2013.<sup>74</sup> Sweden has reported “‘unprecedented’ Cold War-era levels of activity by Russian military bombers and fighter aircraft over the Baltic Sea area.”<sup>75</sup> UK Defense Minister Michael Fallon said Russia was playing a “provocative and dangerous” game that could result in the destruction of an airliner over the UK.<sup>76</sup> Russia has even said it will send nuclear-capable bombers to patrol the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>77</sup> These flights have become a serious threat to air navigation safety because the aircraft reportedly fly without notification or transponders functioning.<sup>78</sup>

In April 2015, there was a particularly serious bomber incident. The UK press reported that two Russian Tu-95 bombers flying over the English Channel were carrying at least one “nuclear warhead-carrying missile, designed to seek and destroy a Vanguard [strategic ballistic missile] submarine.”<sup>79</sup> The UK protested this flight, reportedly over the threat it posed to air navigation.<sup>80</sup>

On July 4, 2015, two Russian Tu-95 bombers reportedly flew within 40 miles of the U.S. and taunted the U.S. pilots saying, “Good morning American pilots, we are here to greet you on your Fourth of July Independence Day.”<sup>81</sup>

Since 2013, there has been a significant increase in threatening flights by nuclear-capable bombers against Japan, including a reported over-flight of a Japanese island.<sup>82</sup> In 2015, *Reuters* reported that the Japanese Air Force announced that “Russian bombers and patrol planes often enter Japan’s air space close to Japan’s northern Hokkaido island and close to four smaller islands which are claimed both by Japan and Russia,” and that Japanese fighter scrambles against Russia and Chinese aircraft had returned to peak Cold War levels.<sup>83</sup> These flights are indicative of an increasingly hostile and provocative posture toward both the West and Japan, intended to strengthen Russia’s political and military standing in support of Moscow’s national objectives.

## **Russian Nuclear Exercises**

While Russian nuclear exercises are discussed in more detail in the next chapter, their increasing frequency and aggressiveness is a reflection of growing hostility toward the West. They also demonstrate Russian views concerning the linkage of nuclear weapons to Russia’s expansionism and war planning.

Russian exercises, which mainly focus on fighting the U.S., NATO and Japan, appear to emphasize nuclear warfighting, starting with Russian first use of a small number of nuclear weapons and escalating to general nuclear war.<sup>84</sup> The Russians routinely stage major strategic nuclear exercises and theater war exercises simulating the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>85</sup> In addition to the normal training role these exercises serve, they likely are intended to influence the actions of NATO states through the intimidating effect they create. The unusual high-profile publicity given to nuclear exercises in Russia appears designed to reinforce this effort at intimidation. According to NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, “Russia’s recent use of nuclear rhetoric, exercises and operations are deeply troubling.”<sup>86</sup> Moreover, he noted that Russia has avoided reporting on these exercises as required by the Vienna Document, agreed to by the Organization

for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and intended to enable confidence-building measures that reduce the risk of hazardous incidents that can lead to inadvertent conflict.<sup>87</sup>

In the same year that the draft Russian nuclear doctrine was made public, Russia conducted the *Zapad* [West]-1999 theater war exercise, in which then-Russian Defense Minister Marshal Igor Sergeev said Russia simulated the first use of nuclear weapons: “Our Army was forced to launch nuclear strikes first which enabled it to achieve a breakthrough in the theater situation.”<sup>88</sup> Alexander Golts wrote that “the enemy looked just exactly like NATO did in Yugoslavia.”<sup>89</sup> Russian press accounts stated that Russia responded with limited nuclear strikes using cruise missiles launched from Tu-95 and Tu-160 bombers “against countries from whose territories the offensive was launched.”<sup>90</sup>

The use of strategic bombers with nuclear cruise missiles was repeated in later *Zapad* exercises.<sup>91</sup> In 2009, the London *Daily Telegraph* reported, “The [Russian] armed forces are said to have carried out ‘war games’ in which nuclear missiles were fired and troops practiced an amphibious landing on the country’s [Poland’s] coast.”<sup>92</sup> In this case, the weapon reportedly used was a tactical nuclear weapon.<sup>93</sup> A senior NATO official told *Reuters* that Russia’s *Zapad* exercise in 2013 was “supposed to be a counter-terrorism exercise but it involved the (simulated) use of nuclear weapons.”<sup>94</sup>

The Russians have also reportedly simulated first use of nuclear weapons in the *Vostok* [East] exercises and in exercises conducted in the Indian Ocean.<sup>95</sup> Russian strategic nuclear exercises have become larger and, since 2012, have been presided over personally by President Putin. In 2013, while Putin hosted a meeting of the G-20 Presidents and Prime Ministers at St. Petersburg, Russia announced it was conducting a large ICBM force exercise—the timing of which was hardly coincidental.<sup>96</sup>

The simulated first use of nuclear weapons is consistent with Russian concepts of conflict “de-escalation,” which was part of the theoretical basis of Putin’s nuclear first-use doctrine.<sup>97</sup> Writing in May 1999, Major-General V.I. Levshin, Colonel A.V. Nedelin, and Colonel M. Ye Sergeev described the concept of “de-escalation of military operations” as follows: “Fulfilling the de-escalation concept is understood to mean actually using nuclear weapons both for showing resolve as well as for the immediate delivery of nuclear strikes against the enemy....It seems to us that the cessation of military operations will be the most acceptable thing for the enemy in this case.”<sup>98</sup>

The 2014-2015 European security crisis triggered by the Russian invasion of the Ukraine has resulted in a dramatic increase in both nuclear and conventional Russian military exercises. Russian exercises and what Russia calls “snap drills” reportedly will reach astounding levels in 2015 (an announcement of 4,000 planned in 2015, including 120 involving the ICBM force).<sup>99</sup> The senior U.S. Army general in Europe, Lt. General Ben Hodges, says Russia has demonstrated the capability to deploy 30,000 troops and 1,000 tanks “really fast.”<sup>100</sup>

Early in the Ukraine crisis, in March 2014, the Russian Strategic Missile Troops conducted a nuclear exercise which reportedly involved a “massive” nuclear strike.<sup>101</sup> In May 2014, Russia announced a very large strategic nuclear exercise involving live launches of tactical and strategic nuclear missiles and missile and bomber defense interceptors. Russia again said the exercise—

in which a number of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Presidents participated—ended in a “massive” nuclear strike.<sup>102</sup> In February 2015, Russia conducted what was characterized as the largest ICBM exercise ever,<sup>103</sup> involving 30 ICBM regiments operating in six regions of Russia.<sup>104</sup> In March 2015, Russia conducted “snap drills” involving strategic nuclear missile submarines, strategic bombers, and the forward deployment of nuclear-capable *Iskander* missiles to Kaliningrad. Noted Russian journalist, Pavel Felgenhauer, wrote that the exercise was intended to send “a clear message: Moscow is not ready to stand down and is threatening the use of force, including nuclear weapons.”<sup>105</sup>

Russia’s theater exercises with simulated nuclear weapons use have also threatened Japan. The Russian *Vostok* [East]-2010 exercise reportedly simulated the use of tactical nuclear weapons and, in part, was fought in the Kuril Islands claimed by Japan.<sup>106</sup> Despite Japan’s protest, the *Vostok*-2014 exercise, also reportedly involved fighting in the Kuril Islands and was a nuclear exercise.<sup>107</sup> Russia did not even try to hide the fact that the exercise was directed against the U.S. and Japan.<sup>108</sup> Russian sources called it the largest exercise in Russian history.<sup>109</sup>

These types of exercises go beyond simple defensive military training. The extent of the simulated use of nuclear weapons is unprecedented and the geographical reach of these exercises is clearly designed to send a strong message to the West and Japan.

### **Forward Deployment of Nuclear-Capable Systems**

Russian officials have frequently made threats to forward deploy nuclear-capable *Iskander* missiles to Kaliningrad (a Russian enclave on the border with Poland). For example, President Dmitry Medvedev threatened to do so the day after Barack Obama was elected U.S. President.<sup>110</sup> Russia appears to believe that the forward deployment of nuclear systems makes the threat more credible and, thus, enhances Russian political and military leverage with the states that are threatened. The likely goal is to convince these states that defending themselves against a Russia willing to employ nuclear weapons to attain its foreign policy objectives is a losing proposition and that accommodation with Russia is the better part of valor.

In fact, Russia reportedly already has deployed nuclear-capable delivery vehicles to Crimea, including Backfire bombers and *Iskander* missiles.<sup>111</sup> Russia’s most modern nuclear-capable fighter bomber, the Su-34, also appears to have been deployed near Crimea.<sup>112</sup> And, it is possible that Russian nuclear weapons have also already been deployed there—the Secretary of Ukraine’s National Security Council has stated that Russia is in the process of doing so.<sup>113</sup> Earlier this year, Russia’s nuclear weapons handling organization, the 12th Main Directorate of the General Staff, announced that Russia is deploying a nuclear weapons handling unit to Crimea.<sup>114</sup>

Additionally, according to Russian press accounts, Russia is deploying advanced nuclear-armed equipment to Kamchatka, the area of the Russian mainland nearest Japan, including the new *Borei* class nuclear ballistic missile submarine and the S-400 advanced air defense weapon.<sup>115</sup>

### **The Russian Military Buildup**

The growing militarization of Russia is a manifestation of its growing hostility toward the West. Russian expatriate Alexei Bayer notes that Russia today is “bursting with negative energy, hatred

of the outside world and enthusiasm for confrontation.”<sup>116</sup> Confrontation requires military capability, and Moscow is channeling a significant amount of resources and energy toward investing in and building up this capability, with military expenditures now reported to be nine percent of Russian GNP.<sup>117</sup> According to former Duma member, Vladimir Ryzhkov, the Russian media “promotes the idea that Russia exists in a hostile environment, that it is locked in a confrontation with the United States and the West—because of which the country must remain on the constant war footing of a ‘besieged fortress,’ arm itself against foreign aggressors and crack down on domestic enemies ranging from the intelligentsia to ordinary discontents.”<sup>118</sup>

Russian modernization and expansion of its conventional and nuclear capabilities (described in Chapter Four) enhance Russia’s ability to implement its provocative threats, particularly in light of the defense spending reductions that have been underway in the United States and virtually every NATO state.<sup>119</sup> This situation is more ominous in light of the asymmetry in approaches to nuclear weapons and the West’s lack of emphasis on nuclear deterrence.

In 2005, then-Chief of the Russian General Staff General Baluyevski stated, “at present and in the foreseeable future the threat to Russia’s security from abroad is fairly small,” and hence, he added, Russia would not “increase the number of our deployed missiles and the weapons they carry” because “this would have taken us nowhere...”<sup>120</sup> That policy was reversed by 2011. Russia is now expanding its strategic nuclear forces both quantitatively and qualitatively.<sup>121</sup> This force buildup appears intended to support Russian expansionism via nuclear coercion, not the West’s Cold War concept of stable mutual deterrence.<sup>122</sup>

Arms control policies, which are discussed in Chapter Five, have contributed to the feasibility and the intimidation potential of the Russian nuclear buildup. The New START Treaty has made it economically possible for the Russians to match and then exceed U.S. strategic nuclear capabilities in numeric terms. As former Vice Chairman of the Duma Defense Committee, Aleksei Arbatov has observed, “It is essentially a treaty on limiting the American strategic forces....If we want our strategic nuclear forces—as the basis of the country’s defense capability and of its status in the world—to have equality with the United States and if parity is important to us, then the new START Treaty makes it much easier for us to maintain it.”<sup>123</sup> As is detailed in Chapter Five, Russia has used arms control and arms control noncompliance to help obtain nuclear capabilities that underpin Russian coercive nuclear threats.

As the U.S National Intelligence Council observed in a December 2012 report, not only is Russia expanding and modernizing its strategic and tactical nuclear forces, but Russia is “pursuing new concepts and capabilities for expanding the role of nuclear weapons in its security strategy,” while the U.S. is going in the opposite direction.<sup>124</sup> Among these concepts reportedly are precision low-yield nuclear weapons and special low collateral damage weapons.<sup>125</sup> These are the types of weapons that Russia reportedly will have a monopoly, or near-monopoly on, and which are well suited to Russia’s strategy of nuclear intimidation.<sup>126</sup>

A now-declassified CIA report in 2000 links Russian nuclear doctrine to its new nuclear weapons: “Moscow’s military doctrine on the use of nuclear weapons has been evolving and probably has served as the justification for the development of very low-yield, high-precision nuclear weapons.”<sup>127</sup> It also noted that the potential use of subkiloton nuclear weapons by Russia “could include artillery, air-to-air missiles, ABM weapons, satellite weapons, or multiple rocket launchers



against tanks or massed troops.”<sup>128</sup> In 1998, Russian journalists Vladimir Kucherenko and Aleksey Podymov reported the Russian Atomic Energy Ministry was working to “create highly accurate ‘clean’ third-generation nuclear weapons...which can be very compact by containing the equivalent of several dozen or hundreds of metric tons of TNT.”<sup>129</sup> There are now reports by well-known Russian journalists concerning Russian deployment of such weapons on its new strategic nuclear missiles.<sup>130</sup> In April 2009, Vice Admiral Oleg Burtsev, Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, stated, “There is no longer any need to equip missiles with powerful nuclear warheads....We can install low-yield warheads on existing cruise missiles.”<sup>131</sup> And in 2014, Russian Defense Minister General of the Army Sergei Shoigu said, “Given the role and significance of long-range precision weapons in strategic deterrence, the number of precision-weapon delivery vehicles is expected to increase fourfold before 2021.”<sup>132</sup>

Such capabilities are *not* inherently destabilizing, but they are likely to be so when used to buttress Russian nuclear first-use threats and efforts to coerce neighbors into accepting a renewed Russian-dominated sphere of influence.<sup>133</sup>

Russia appears to believe it can exploit the West’s fear of war, particularly nuclear war, to force Eastern Europeans to accept Russian dominance and “Russification”<sup>134</sup>—with Western Europe’s coerced acceptance. Correspondingly, the abrogation of arms control agreements and the development and deployment of new weapons, both nuclear and conventional, appear intended to intimidate.<sup>135</sup> Russia, for example, has recently given considerable publicity to the claimed capabilities of its new *Armata* tank and new infantry combat vehicles which were recently shown in the Moscow Victory Day parade.<sup>136</sup> Large displays of modern Russian military equipment are made in the annual Victory Day military parades,<sup>137</sup> and there is constant reporting in the Russian state-run media on new and supposedly unmatched Russian weapons capabilities, including a new long-range, underwater drone weapon armed with a large-yield nuclear warhead.<sup>138</sup> The July 2015 Russian disclosure that “more than eighty warships and support vessels of various classes” were on duty at sea is another example of this type of signaling.<sup>139</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Moscow’s confrontational approach toward the West, including Japan, is a manifestation of Russia’s overall grand strategy as outlined in Chapter One and its expressed threat perceptions. The aim of this policy is to recover the great power status of the Soviet Union by creating a Russian sphere of domination over former Soviet territory. Mounting Russian hostility toward the West is reflected in increasing Russian suppression of democracy, the Russian nuclear and conventional military buildup, its constant military threats, its nuclear threats and exercises, its military aggression in Ukraine, and its intensifying pressure on smaller states and neutrals.

Russia seeks to exploit the Western fear of war, particularly nuclear war, by a variety of nuclear threats, doctrinal statements about the first use of nuclear weapons, predictions of war, including nuclear war, well-publicized military exercises involving first use of nuclear weapons against the United States and its allies, threatened and actual forward deployment of nuclear systems, threats to deploy new types of super weapons, threats to abrogate arms control agreements, and actual Russian violations of existing agreements. The upgrading of Russian military power and the advertisement of its capabilities by publicity, military exercises, provocative aircraft flights, and military threats are a key part of this strategy. In light of current Russian economic and

conventional military weakness, nuclear weapons and nuclear threats play a central role in this Russian strategy of intimidation. The potential for miscalculation, crises, and conflict are fully apparent in this combination of Russian goals and strategies.

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## Chapter 4. Russian Nuclear and Conventional Force Programs and Russian Grand Strategy

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### Introduction

Although Russian conventional forces are superior to any individual country that borders it (outside of China), given Russia's conventional weakness relative to the NATO alliance, lower economic potential, and declining population, Moscow has chosen to rely heavily on its nuclear weapons. Indeed, Vladimir Putin and the Russian elite often emphasize the central utility of nuclear weapons, regularly warning the West, "it is better not to enter into any potential armed conflict against us."<sup>1</sup> As Putin admonished in 2014:

Let me remind you that Russia is one of the world's biggest nuclear powers...These are not just words—this is the reality. What's more, we are strengthening our nuclear deterrent capability and developing our armed forces. They have become more compact and effective and are becoming more modern in terms of the weapons at their disposal.<sup>2</sup>

Nuclear weapons reinforce Russia's claim that it is a great world power and thereby entitled to a distinct sphere of influence. Russian leaders appear to view nuclear weapons as the ultimate way to make the world "fear," or at least respect Russia, and provide a political lever to intimidate, coerce, and deter Western states from attempting to interfere militarily against Russian expansionism. As early as 2006, Chief of the General Staff General of the Army Yury Baluyevski spoke about the role of Russia's nuclear deterrent against "anyone who could try to test the strength of our borders or tap our natural resources."<sup>3</sup>

More disturbingly, Russia appears to consider nuclear weapons employable to "de-escalate" a conflict against a conventionally-superior adversary. For these reasons, the Putin regime considers its nuclear arsenal essential to restoring Russia to its former greatness.

This chapter examines Russian nuclear strategy as an essential instrument to expand Russia's sphere of influence. It surveys individual components of Russia's nuclear strategy, describing Russian nuclear doctrine and policy, current and emerging nuclear and conventional force procurements, and Russian behavior regarding its nuclear weapons. It then identifies how Russia's nuclear weapons fit more broadly into Moscow's grand strategy as described in Chapter One.

Today, it is undeniable that the regime generally, and Putin personally, place great emphasis on nuclear modernization and developments vis-à-vis NATO as a point of pride and importance. Putin himself stated in a 2006 address to top managers of the nuclear weapons industry that, "Our country's nuclear potential is of vital importance for our national security interests. The reliability of our 'nuclear shield' and the state of our nuclear weapons complex are a crucial component of Russia's world power status."<sup>4</sup> Earlier, in 2003, Putin said that "the main foundation of national security in Russia remains, and will remain for a long time to come, nuclear deterrence forces."<sup>5</sup>

To be sure, nuclear weapons have become embedded in Russian strategic culture as visible symbols of Russian power and authority. For example, to showcase the physical transfer of power, a highly visible ceremony is held in which the outgoing president passes the *Cheget* (nuclear briefcase) to the incoming president-elect. High-ranking Russian leaders often personally observe nuclear weapons exercises. In 2005, Putin actually rode in a Tu-160 nuclear-capable long-range bomber during a training exercise (the bomber launched the conventionally armed Kh-555 cruise missile), an act that was well received by the Russian public, in order to “show unlimited power – his and the awesome bomber.”<sup>6</sup>

Even the Russian Orthodox Church supports Russia’s nuclear weapons program and nuclear deterrence. The land-based nuclear forces have their own patron saint, Saint Barbara, and church officials regularly speak about the need for nuclear deterrence.<sup>7</sup> During a 2007 interview, Putin linked religion and nuclear weapons in Russia, stating “These themes are closely connected because both the traditional faiths of the Russian Federation and Russia’s nuclear shield are two things that strengthen Russian statehood and create the necessary conditions for ensuring the country’s internal and external security.”<sup>8</sup> Clearly, some of the leadership’s actions and overtures are meant to bolster domestic support for the leadership’s decision to focus on nuclear deterrence, but also to solidify the conviction that these weapons are a godsend, preserving the status and safety of the Russian state and its citizens.

The Russian leadership sees nuclear weapons as symbols of greatness and power, and highly-visible physical examples of Russian strength and self-reliance. According to the chief of the Russian General Staff, Valery Gerasimov, this point is without argument: “Support for our strategic nuclear forces to ensure their high military capability combined with...growth of the military potential of the general forces will assure that [the United States and NATO] do not gain military superiority over our country.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, unlike the West, where the role of nuclear weapons is primarily to deter existential threats, Russian leaders increasingly see nuclear weapons as instruments to help achieve and sustain Russian expansionist goals.

## **Nuclear Doctrine**

Russian military documents have been quite consistent about the need to maintain, and if necessary, employ nuclear weapons. Currently, Russia considers nuclear weapons the foundation of Russian security. According to the U.S. National Intelligence Council, “Nuclear ambitions in the U.S. and Russia over the last 20 years have evolved in opposite directions. Reducing the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. security strategy is a U.S. objective, while Russia is pursuing new concepts and capabilities for expanding the role of nuclear weapons in its security strategy.”<sup>10</sup>

In the 2014 Military Doctrine Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons first. Nuclear weapons can be employed, “...in response to use against it and (or) its allies by nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, as well as in the case of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is under threat.”<sup>11</sup> This is nothing novel, as this language is identical to that in the 2010 doctrine. Unlike the previous doctrine, however, the 2014 document specifically states that strategic deterrence includes, “nuclear and nonnuclear deterrence” which involves “the preventing of military conflict.”<sup>12</sup> It also says, “Nuclear weapons will remain an important factor in preventing the outbreak of nuclear

military conflicts and conventional military conflicts (large-scale war, regional war.)”<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the latest iteration significantly upgraded the threat perception of NATO, codifying the alliance as Russia’s principal adversary.

While the public version of Russia’s nuclear doctrine endorses first use of nuclear weapons, it does not contain provisions regarding “preemptive” or “preventative” nuclear attacks. However, senior Russian officials have repeatedly acknowledged that Russian nuclear weapons policy does in fact include such options. In 2008, Yuri Baluyevski, then-Chief of the General Staff, stated, “...[Russia] may resort to a pre-emptive nuclear strike in cases specified by its doctrine.”<sup>14</sup> In 2009, Secretary of the Russian National Security Council Nikolai Patrushev argued for including preemptive nuclear strikes at the regional or local level.<sup>15</sup> During the recent development of the 2014 Military Doctrine, General Yuri Yakubov, a senior Defense Ministry official, echoed Baluyevski and Patrushev’s position when he called for Russia’s updated doctrine to specify the conditions under which Russia would launch a preemptive nuclear strike against NATO.<sup>16</sup> Yakubov’s recommendations apparently reflect many Russian views, as *Interfax* reported: “The military were very insistent about including the provision for preemptive nuclear strikes.”<sup>17</sup>

Given the high credibility of these recurring calls for preemptive nuclear options, the official public version of Russian nuclear doctrine appears “partial,” and “fragmentary.”<sup>18</sup> Correspondingly, in 2009 the Russian Defense Ministry prominently announced that its policy on “the use of nuclear weapons as an instrument of strategic deterrence” would be in the “closed part” of the new military doctrine.<sup>19</sup> This classified section reportedly is contained in a secret Presidential document entitled, *The Foundations of State Policy in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence to 2020*, which Russian officials have said includes policy on everything from potential enemies to nuclear use.<sup>20</sup> According to an *Interfax* report, General Baluyevski confirmed this is where “conditions for preemptive nuclear strikes” are codified.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, *Ria Novosti* military correspondent Ilya Kramnik wrote in 2015 that the 2010 revision of Russia’s military doctrine “further lowered” the threshold of combat use of nuclear weapons.<sup>22</sup> Then-Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov’s response to Russian news agencies in 2003, when asked why Russia did not have preemptive nuclear strike options, candidly confirmed that the full description of Russian nuclear doctrine was not necessarily included in official public elaborations:<sup>23</sup>

What we say is one thing. That sounds cynical, but everything that we plan does not necessarily have to be made public. We believe that from the foreign policy viewpoint it is better to say that. But what we actually do is an entirely different matter...<sup>24</sup>

Rather than reduce the role of nuclear weapons, Moscow’s nuclear doctrine appears to include coercive and expansionist goals in its first-use strategy of nuclear “de-escalation,” as described in Chapter Three. Should deterrence fail, Russia envisions the potential first use of nuclear weapons to demonstrate resolve and escalate a conflict much higher than an adversary would be willing to accept, thereby terminating the conflict. According to *Priority Tasks for the Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation*, “De-escalation of aggression is forcing the enemy to halt military action by a threat to deliver or by actual delivery of strikes of varying intensity with reliance on conventional and (or) nuclear weapons.”<sup>25</sup> The apparent underlying expectation is that rather than risk further escalation to an expanded nuclear war, Russia’s opponent would back down and terminate the conflict on terms favorable to Russia. This nuclear first-use/escalation threat appears intended, at least in part, to preclude stiff resistance, including from NATO, to

Russian military initiatives in regional contingencies such as its ongoing military operations in Eastern Ukraine.

Consequently, Russia appears to have advanced a coercive theory of limited nuclear first use that envisages a short-range, regional nuclear threat that would be credible at lower levels of conflict while bypassing "...avalanche-like escalation of the use of nuclear weapons to the very exchange of massive nuclear strikes with strategic nuclear systems."<sup>26</sup> Russian strategy seems to assume an imbalance in will and the stakes of a conflict in favor of Moscow. Escalation discussions reportedly end in the belief that NATO will conciliate because the dangers of escalation will be deemed by Western leaders to be far too great for the alliance to continue.<sup>27</sup>

As noted earlier, then-Commander of Strategic Missile Troops Lt. General Andrei Shvaychenko acknowledged that the potential for nuclear employment is a strategic reality in Russia's military planning. According to Shvaychenko:

In peacetime, they [ICBMs] are intended to ensure deterrence of large-scale nonnuclear or nuclear aggression against Russia and its allies. In a conventional war, they ensure that the opponent is forced to cease hostilities, on advantageous conditions for Russia, by means of single or multiple preventive strikes against the aggressors' most important facilities. In a nuclear war, they ensure the destruction of facilities of the opponent's military and economic potential by means of an initial massive nuclear missile strike and subsequent multiple and single nuclear missile strikes.<sup>28</sup>

Three years later, Gregory Vilegzhanin, Deputy Chief of the Ministry of Defense's 46<sup>th</sup> Central Scientific Research Center, wrote that due to present day circumstances, Russia must maintain a variety of nuclear weapons in order to defeat an aggressor and (or) to compel its withdrawal from a regional conflict.<sup>29</sup> Both Shvaychenko's and Vilegzhanin's thinking appear to directly reflect Russia's first-use strategy. Although the official Military Doctrine refrains from explicitly identifying this strategy, repeated references fit neatly in the "de-escalation" conceptual framework.<sup>30</sup>

Russian nuclear strategy and the potential for escalation have come under unprecedented condemnation from Western officials. Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work and then-Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. James Winnefeld, as discussed in Chapter Three, condemned Russian nuclear first-use logic, warning "Anyone who thinks they can control escalation through the use of nuclear weapons is literally playing with fire. Escalation is escalation, and nuclear use would be the ultimate escalation."<sup>31</sup> However, the Russian leadership appears to perceive nuclear threats and the possibility of nuclear first use as critical instruments of coercion and these views seem likely to remain a main feature of Moscow's nuclear strategy for the foreseeable future.

### **Current and Emerging Russian Strategic Force Posture**

Corresponding to these Russian nuclear developments, Russia is allocating significant, and increasingly scarce, resources to modernize nuclear and conventional strike capabilities. Deputy Prime Minister Dimitri Rogozin has declared that Russia will modernize its nuclear forces by 100 percent, while Vladimir Putin has stated at least 40 new strategic missiles will be delivered in 2015.<sup>32</sup> Legacy Russian ICBMs (Soviet-era SS-18 Satans and SS-19 Stiletos) have been

receiving modifications in order to prolong their service life.<sup>33</sup> The ICBM fleet in the near term, reportedly, will be made up of modern *Topol-M* single warhead ICBMs and the multi-warhead RS-24 *Yars*.<sup>34</sup> In August 2015, the leading producer of Russian strategic and tactical nuclear missiles said that production will increase 17 percent by the end of this year.<sup>35</sup>

Recent official statements and press reports confirm that even newer strategic nuclear systems are already being developed. Russia is developing a new heavy ICBM to replace its Satan SS-18 missiles, designated the *Sarmat*. The missile reportedly is due to be deployed around 2018-2020.<sup>36</sup> According to the Commander of Strategic Missile Forces of Russia, Sergei Karakeyav, this 100-ton liquid-fueled “monster” is expected to overcome any missile defense design and will reportedly carry 10 heavy or 15 medium nuclear warheads.<sup>37</sup> However, Deputy Minister of Defense Yuri Borisov told *RSN Radio* that the *Sarmat* could deliver payloads of up to 10 metric tons,<sup>38</sup> which could indicate that the *Sarmat* is larger and more capable of carrying warheads than previously reported in the Russian media. Moreover, “in parallel to the *Sarmat*,” Russia’s Engineering Research and Production Center reportedly is developing another advanced liquid-fuel ICBM, which could be a second heavy missile system.<sup>39</sup>

Russia is also manufacturing another ICBM, the RS-26 *Rubezh*. The Russian Defense Ministry has said the *Rubezh* missile will be road-mobile and have Multiple Independent Reentry Vehicles (MIRVs).<sup>40</sup> There is some speculation that the *Rubezh* range makes it an illegal intermediate range system outlawed under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.<sup>41</sup> Irrespective of the RS-26’s compliance with the INF Treaty, it does not appear to have enough range to perform the role of a true missile of intercontinental attack. According to the National Air and Space Intelligence Center (Air Force Intelligence), it has only about half the range of any other Russian ICBM.<sup>42</sup> In 2011, Commander of the Strategic Missile Forces, Colonel General Sergei Karakeyav, described the *Rubezh* as a “medium-class” solid-propellant missile “with a new type of payload.”<sup>43</sup> Some Russian reports note that the missile is substantially different from the *Topol/Yars* and could be mounted in a much smaller transporter erector launcher (TEL).<sup>44</sup>

Putin’s missile programs appear to focus heavily on mobility and maximum warhead upload through MIRVs. In order to sustain a high level of weapon survivability, Russia reportedly has been deploying new ICBMs on mobile launchers and in superhard silos.<sup>45</sup> The *Yars* ICBM and RS-26 are road-mobile and MIRVed (*Yars* is also silo-deployed); both characteristics are permitted under the New START Treaty. *ITAR-TASS* reported that the *Sarmat* heavy ICBM will be protected by increased silo hardness, ballistic missile defense, and powerful electronic jamming.<sup>46</sup>

In addition, Putin has endorsed the reintroduction of a new rail-mobile ICBM system, dubbed the *Barguzin*.<sup>47</sup> According to an unnamed Russian source, one regiment of the *Barguzin* will include six *Yars* or *Yars-M* (apparently the RS-26) MIRVed missiles, and a division will include five trains (regiment);<sup>48</sup> it reportedly should become operational around 2019 (and is expected to stay in service until at least 2040).<sup>49</sup>

ICBMs represent only one leg of Russia’s strategic triad and two-thirds of its warhead stockpile.<sup>50</sup> Putin added in a Defense Ministry address that, “We must continue modernizing our strategic aviation and put the two missile-carrying submarines Vladimir Monomakh and Alexander Nevsky on combat duty. In the medium term through to 2021, we need to complete the transition to entirely

modern arms for our ground-based nuclear forces, modernize the entire fleet of upgraded Tu-160 and Tu-95ms bombers, and also develop a new generation strategic bomber in 2023.”<sup>51</sup>

According to Russian media, in December 2014 Russia accepted its third *Borei*-class ballistic missile nuclear submarine, or SSBN, into service.<sup>52</sup> Each *Borei* reportedly is armed with 16 *Bulava* SLBMs (SS-N-30s) that can currently deliver six warheads and can be upgraded to carry 10 warhead missiles per missile well over 8,000 kilometers.<sup>53</sup> According to Russian open sources, by 2020, the Defense Ministry plans to have eight *Borei*-class subs.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the Russian navy reportedly has received two new versions of the legacy SS-N-23, the RSM-54 *Sineva* missile and the further improved *Liner* missile, for the Soviet-era Delta IV strategic submarine.<sup>55</sup> Russian officials indicate that they expect the missile to remain in service until 2030 or longer. However, it is unclear whether the Delta submarines can be preserved for this long if they continue sea patrols.<sup>56</sup>

Russia reportedly is developing a nuclear-powered drone submarine to carry a multi-megaton nuclear warhead.<sup>57</sup> The possibility of a Russian nuclear-armed drone submarine was first reported in September 2015 by Bill Gertz in the *Washington Free Beacon*. In November 2015, apparent plans for the drone submarine appeared on a page in a briefing for Putin that was televised in Russia; this material about a nuclear drone subsequently was confirmed as authentic by a Kremlin press spokesman.<sup>58</sup> The document in the televised briefing indicated that the nuclear-powered “drone would be able to travel at the depth of up to 1,000 m at a fairly high speed (something like 105 km/h? *sic*)” with a range of 10,000-km.<sup>59</sup> The Russian document reportedly said that the purpose of the drone submarine was, “Damaging the important components of the adversary's economy in a coastal area and inflicting unacceptable damage to a country's territory by creating areas of wide radioactive contamination that would be unsuitable for military, economic, or other activity for long periods of time.”<sup>60</sup> This apparent “leak” (intentional or unintentional) clearly suggests a new type of Russian nuclear capability and potential threat focusing on inflicting intentional, widespread and enduring societal damage via nuclear contamination.

Russian strategic bombers are also getting a facelift. Both the Tu-95MS (Bear) and Tu-160 (Blackjack) strategic bombers reportedly have been undergoing extensive modernization, which should allow the aircraft to remain in service to 2020-2025, perhaps even 2030.<sup>61</sup> In 2015, Russian press reports announced Russia would restart production of at least 50 more advanced Tu-160s (Tu-160M2s), carrying a new assortment of cruise missiles and other weapons.<sup>62</sup> Russia reportedly also plans to test and field a new long-range strategic bomber, the stealthy PAK-DA, to be in service in 2023-2025.<sup>63</sup> In addition to the Kh-102 nuclear cruise missile, some Russian press reports indicate the PAK-DA could eventually carry hypersonic weapons as well.<sup>64</sup>

Russia reportedly is seeking to develop hypersonic missiles. According to *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Russia tested the nuclear-capable Yu-71 hypersonic glide vehicle (also known as Project 4202) from an SS-19 in 2015.<sup>65</sup> According to Russian arms control analyst, Pavel Podvig, the Yu-71 has been tested several other times and the hypersonic program has been under development since 1990.<sup>66</sup> To be sure, in 2012 Deputy Prime Minister Dimitri Rogozin proclaimed that creation and production of hypersonic weapons has become a priority for Russia.<sup>67</sup> The *Jane's* report concluded Russia may procure approximately 24 Yu-71 vehicles between 2020-2025, potentially

to be deployed on the *Sarmat*.<sup>68</sup> Russia also reportedly has a program for a drone submarine that would carry a 5-10 megaton nuclear warhead.<sup>69</sup>

Russia has also sought to strengthen its non-strategic, or tactical, nuclear weapons (NSNWs) and platforms, which are intended to play a leading role at the regional level. In line with the 2014 Military Doctrine, many of these systems are capable of carrying both nuclear and conventional warheads, greatly expanding Russia's strategic toolkit. For this discussion, NSNW systems include dual-capable platforms that are of less than intercontinental range and deemed "non-strategic" for arms control purposes.<sup>70</sup>

Russia has never disclosed the configuration and number of its NSNWs. In 2011, the Obama administration stated that Russia has between 2,000 and 4,000 tactical nuclear weapons.<sup>71</sup> According to noted Russian nuclear strategist Alexei Arbatov, Russia's diverse NSNW arsenal includes free-fall bombs, depth charges, sea-launched cruise missiles, torpedoes, and air defense warheads, among others.<sup>72</sup> Warheads are also likely assigned to land-based systems, including short-range ballistic missiles.<sup>73</sup>

The mainstay of the Russian ground force's NSNW development is the advanced *Iskander-M* road-mobile ballistic missile system and the *Iskander-K* ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM). If deployed in locations identified openly by Moscow, the *Iskander* systems reportedly would be capable of targeting Poland, Germany, Norway, the Baltic States, Romania, and Turkey.<sup>74</sup> President Putin has said that, "...in its segment, *Iskander* is the most effective weapon in the world."<sup>75</sup> Russia has announced it will have at least 120 *Iskander* launchers by 2016.<sup>76</sup> Open Russian reports also state that Moscow is developing an upgraded *Iskander* variant, testing a new treaty-prohibited, intermediate-range GLCM, and replacing the *Oka* missile which previously was scrapped under the INF Treaty.<sup>77</sup>

Moscow has been supplementing its air-based NSNWs and weapon delivery platforms as well. According to Russian press reports, Russia has modernized its Su-24M (Fencer) and will be replacing it with the much more sophisticated Su-34 (Fullback).<sup>78</sup> In 2012, then-commander of the Russian airforce, Colonel-General Alexander Zelin stated that the Su-34s would have a strategic nuclear mission and would carry long-range cruise missiles, likely for a theater nuclear role.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, Russia has said that around 30 Tu-22M (Backfire) strategic bombers are being upgraded to allow for a greater range of armaments for nuclear strike missions (designated Tu-22M3M).<sup>80</sup> According to Russian military commentator Ilya Kramnik, one of the main objectives of the Tu-22M3M is the destruction of sea-based targets, primarily U.S. aircraft carriers.<sup>81</sup> This reportedly will be aided by a new anti-ship cruise missile, the *Ragduga* Kh-32, which will replace the Kh-22 (AS-4 Kitchen).<sup>82</sup>

Finally, the Russian navy reportedly is also working to develop new platforms and long-range cruise missiles.<sup>83</sup> Russian officials announced two new fifth generation submarine projects, classified as an "underwater interceptor" and an "aircraft carrier killer."<sup>84</sup> In September 2015, the chief of the Russian Navy Admiral Viktor Churkov stated, "The main efforts in designing the new generation of strategic purpose missile submarines and multi-purpose nuclear submarines are aimed at ensuring stealth, a significant reduction of the noisiness..., a modernization of the communication and control equipment, as well as equipping them with automated reconnaissance and warning systems. The weapons will be improved accordingly."<sup>85</sup>



According to the manufacturing company, “The second ship will be a cruise missile carrier [used] for defeating coastal and surface targets.”<sup>86</sup> At present, Russia apparently is deploying its stealthy Project 885 *Yasen*-class multi-purpose nuclear submarine. The *Yasen* reportedly can be equipped with a family of long-range nuclear capable missiles, such as the *Granat* and the supersonic *Kalibr*, designed for precision strikes against ground or sea-based targets (such as aircraft carriers).<sup>87</sup> According to Russian open sources, the missiles also can be launched at important coastal facilities, potentially along NATO’s westernmost states (such as the U.S., Canada, and Britain).<sup>88</sup> Former U.S. Commander of Northern Command, Army General Charles Jacoby, confirmed that Russia is “capable of introducing cruise missiles into a theater from submarines.”<sup>89</sup>

Rather than having no discernible missions assigned to them as some analysts suggest, NSNWs serve as Russia’s most visible means of issuing coercive nuclear escalation threats to a level intended to frustrate, if not terminate, a military confrontation with NATO.<sup>90</sup>

Evidence suggests that, consistent with Russia’s so-called de-escalation (i.e., first-use) nuclear strategy discussed above, Russia has sought to augment its forces by emphasizing precision low-yield, low collateral damage nuclear weapons.<sup>91</sup> Russian military and defense officials appear to believe that low-yield nuclear weapons provide a means to neutralize perceived U.S. conventional advantages and make Russian nuclear threats more credible.<sup>92</sup> According to some Russian strategists, low-yield non-strategic nuclear weapons could allow Russia to escalate a conflict via nuclear first use without undue risk of a large-scale strategic nuclear response.<sup>93</sup> That is, should Russia view a limited nuclear strike (or the threat thereof) as necessary, Russian low-yield nuclear weapons would be the most realistic and credible threat as their limited effects would help discourage rather than provoke Western escalation. For Viktor Mikhailov, former Russian Atomic Energy Minister, this reasoning was sensible and would increase Moscow’s ability to react to perceived threats:

Today the consequences of the use of nuclear weapons are viewed as so horrific that no one will dare use them. As a result, a real nuclear war has become, in essence, impossible. Nuclear pressure will again become an effective political instrument if the threat of nuclear strikes is made more real. For that, it is necessary to have the possibility to inflict ‘pinpoint,’ low-yield nuclear strikes on military targets located anywhere on the globe. In so doing, it is assumed that such ‘pinpoint’ strikes will not bring about an immediate global nuclear war.<sup>94</sup>

A 1999 article in the army journal *Armeyskiy Sbornik* reported that, “For an effective impact across the entire spectrum of targets, strategic missile systems should be capable of conducting ‘surgical’ strikes over a wide spectrum of ranges in the shortest period of time with minimal ecological consequences. This is achieved by using highly accurate, super-low-yield nuclear weapons...”<sup>95</sup> In December 2002, then-Director of the Sarov nuclear weapons laboratory, Viktor Mikhailov, agreed and noted considerable work was being done to accomplish that mission: “The scientists are developing a nuclear ‘scalpel’ capable of ‘surgically removing’ and destroying very localized targets. The low-yield warhead will be surrounded with a super hardened casing which makes it possible to penetrate 30-40 meters into rock and destroy a buried target—for example, a troop command and control point or a nuclear munitions storage facility.”<sup>96</sup> Nikol Voloshin, a senior

official of the Ministry of Atomic Energy, announced that these weapons were currently in Russia's arsenal. "The [nuclear] ammunition we have developed ranges in power from tons to megatons of TNT equivalence."<sup>97</sup>

Russian interest has remained in low-yield, or clean, nuclear warheads. As previously mentioned, Vice Admiral Oleg Burtsev, then-Deputy Chief of the Russian Federation Navy Main Staff, told *Ria Novosti*, "There is no need to carry a powerful warhead, and we can go over to *low-yield nuclear charges* that can be installed on existing models of cruise missiles (emphasis added)."<sup>98</sup> In a *Ria Novosti* article, it was argued that, in addition to the *Sineva's* standard 100 kiloton nuclear warhead, the SLBM could be armed with next generation "sub-kiloton warheads having a yield of several dozen tons of TNT, which enables pinpoint targeting."<sup>99</sup> Viktor Litovkin, deputy editor of the Russian military newspaper *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, indicated that Russia's other SLBM, the *Bulava*, could also carry nuclear warheads with yields between 50-200 tons of TNT for highly accurate strikes.<sup>100</sup> These reports correspond with Mikhailov's original 2002 assessments, in which he calculated it would take no more than 10 to 20 years before Russia would receive the "nuclear scalpel."<sup>101</sup> Such weapons, Mikhailov argued, could be a critical component for Russian nuclear strategy as, "...[low and super-low yield nuclear warheads] can be realistically utilized in the event of large scale military conflict involving the use of conventional arms or mass destruction weapons..."<sup>102</sup>

### Intimidating Nuclear Exercises

Russia first showcased its nuclear first-use theory during the major military exercise *Zapad-99*, which reportedly envisioned an intervention scenario by a NATO-like enemy conducting devastating air attacks with precision weaponry against the Kaliningrad enclave.<sup>103</sup> Russia responded to the threat of conventional defeat with limited nuclear strikes from Tu-95 and Tu-160 strategic bombers utilizing air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs).<sup>104</sup> "The exercise tested one of the provisions of Russia's military doctrine concerning a possible use of nuclear weapons when all other measures are exhausted," then-Defense Minister Igor Sergeev explained to the press. "We did pursue such an option. All measures were exhausted. Our defenses proved to be ineffective. An enemy continued to push into Russia. And that's when the decision to use nuclear weapons was made."<sup>105</sup>

*Zapad-99* accomplished two things: It demonstrated that Russia had practical, asymmetric response options to perceived regional threats and, more importantly, it signaled the potential for limited Russian first use of nuclear weapons. The political message was unmistakable.

Since *Zapad-99*, Russia appears to have tested many aspects of its nuclear doctrine against hypothetical enemies which resemble the U.S. and NATO. The *Vostok-10*, *Vostok-14*, and a tactical drill in the Indian Ocean reportedly simulated limited nuclear strikes using short-range ballistic missiles and cruise missiles.<sup>106</sup> Other exercises, such as Security-04 and Stability-08, demonstrated the ability to employ large-scale nuclear strikes to "...prevent escalation of military aggression against Russia, including by use of nuclear weapons," by engaging Russia's entire nuclear triad.<sup>107</sup>

As discussed in Chapter Three, the use of nuclear threats and exercises to send political messages to Western states has become a recurring theme in Russian behavior. Throughout the

ongoing Ukraine conflict, Moscow has coupled aggressive actions with both minor and large-scale nuclear drills. This includes several test launches of *Iskander* missiles, “snap” exercises that reportedly relocated nuclear-capable platforms to Crimea and Kaliningrad on short notice, and amplified aggressive long-range bomber patrols and submarine intrusions.<sup>108</sup> In 2014, Russia launched large-scale nuclear war drills involving 10,000 soldiers and test launches of Russia’s entire strategic deterrent in order to check “...the readiness of massive and simultaneous use of nuclear weapons in Russia.”<sup>109</sup> In February 2015, the Strategic Missile Forces reportedly conducted their largest exercise ever, employing over 30 road-mobile and silo-based missile regiments across 12 regions of the country.<sup>110</sup> According to the Defense Ministry spokesman for the Strategic Missile Forces, missions included “red alert, maneuvering in actual combat and deterrence of sabotage units and precision-guidance attacks of a simulated enemy.”<sup>111</sup> In late August and September 2015, Russia reportedly staged two extremely large ICBM force exercises involving field deployments of mobile ICBMs.<sup>112</sup> According to a major Russian publication, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, in stark contrast to Western thinking, the two large-scale Russian exercises “in essence reject the well-known thesis that in a nuclear war, there cannot be a victor.”<sup>113</sup> Threatening exercises show no signs of abating.

Indeed, the volume and intensity of Russia’s nuclear exercises are growing. As one observer remarked, recent exercises involving the *Iskander* and Tu-22 seem to serve as a reminder that Russian doctrine envisions the first use of nuclear weapons in certain scenarios against NATO forces—a clear warning to keep out of Russia’s undertakings.<sup>114</sup> Correspondingly, the Kremlin has asserted “in no uncertain terms” the viability of its nuclear strike potential, and its willingness and ability to follow through.<sup>115</sup> The decision to use nuclear weapons to conclude many of the exercises appears intended to signal that the Kremlin would rather authorize nuclear strikes than concede defeat in a regional contingency.

Russian military exercises and threats often coincide with major events and heightened periods of tension to display opposition toward certain polices, such as NATO’s commitment to missile defense. Nikolai Patrushev’s explosive statements about adopting preemptive nuclear strikes coincided with then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s arrival in Moscow for a meeting on formulating the New START Treaty, suggesting that Moscow believed this nuclear threat enhanced its position.<sup>116</sup> Prior to the 2006 G8 summit, Putin threatened U.S. and NATO missile defense plans in Europe: “It is obvious that if part of the strategic nuclear potential of the United States is located in Europe we will have to respond.”<sup>117</sup> When asked, Putin made it clear that this response would be nuclear: “What kind of steps are we are going to take in response? Of course we are going to acquire new targets in Europe.”<sup>118</sup> Vladimir Putin and other members of the Russian elite have made similar threats in the apparent belief such statements achieve political goals.<sup>119</sup>

Indeed, when Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko threatened to retake Crimea, Sergei Lavrov gave an implicit nuclear retort: “If it comes to aggression against Russian territory, which Crimea and Sevastopol are parts of, I would not advise anyone to do that.” Lavrov went on to warn that Russian Military Doctrine is “very clear” on how Moscow would react to any attempt to challenge its territorial integrity, alluding to their nuclear doctrine.<sup>120</sup> Amid rumors that Russia was placing *Iskander-M*, *Iskander-K*, and Tu-22M3M nuclear-capable systems in Crimea, Lavrov again suggested that Russia could respond to regional challenges by placing nuclear weapons in Crimea, which he described as Russia’s right.<sup>121</sup> Other Russian officials have followed Lavrov’s

example, making equally disturbing remarks.<sup>122</sup> Most telling was Vladimir Putin's acknowledgement that he was prepared to put Russian nuclear forces on alert during the Crimean takeover in order to deter outside intervention.<sup>123</sup>

By linking Crimea with Russia's nuclear arsenal, Moscow appears intent to consolidate its control over Crimea as Russian territory by promising nuclear escalation should an adversary attempt to retake the peninsula. As Deputy Prime Minister Rogozin has insisted, nuclear weapons would "undoubtedly" be used in certain situations to defend Russian territory and interests, which apparently includes the recently annexed Crimea.<sup>124</sup> This policy development has potentially profound implications for regions closely connected to Russia—historically, culturally, or economically.

### **Russian Nuclear and Conventional Force Programs and Russia Grand Strategy**

Russia clearly attributes political and military value to its nuclear arsenal, and the threat of limited nuclear first use more specifically, as a means to support its efforts to reassert its dominance over the post-Soviet space. Moscow's strategy is intended to intimidate neighbors and deter outside interference in Russian activities through the threat of nuclear first use. Russia's apparently low nuclear threshold raises the stakes in any conflict, and compels adversaries to confront the possibility that should they become involved, so too would Russian nuclear weapons. This has been prominently displayed throughout hostilities in Ukraine, as Russian nuclear exercises, official statements, and bomber patrols are intended to intimidate Western states.

First and foremost, Russia's strategy couples multidimensional operations with overt nuclear threats for the purpose of precluding retaliation by the aggrieved party and/or its allies—thus giving Russia a free hand to pursue its expansionist goals. Moscow seeks this seemingly ultimate trump card within its "near abroad." This use of nuclear weapons is not a replay of Cold War notions of mutual nuclear deterrence. It is a strategy of nuclear coercion to support expansionist goals.

As noted in Chapter Three, Deputy Commander of NATO Forces in Europe General Sir Adrian Bradshaw, concluded in this regard that Russia's "threat of escalation might be used to prevent re-establishment of territorial integrity."<sup>125</sup> Acclaimed Russian analyst Pavel Felgenhauer agreed, suggesting Moscow is becoming comfortable with using the threat of nuclear war to "scare the West into concessions."<sup>126</sup> This continued approach could lead to an "emboldened Russia brandishing nuclear weapons each time it wants something."<sup>127</sup> Despite describing its policy as purely defensive, it is clear that Russia considers nuclear coercion as a great power instrument to be leveraged during periods of hostilities to protect a potential fait accompli.

If, as seems to be the case, Moscow views this as a viable strategy, Russia may continue to act more aggressively toward post-Soviet states, potentially including the eastern portion of NATO, backed up by nuclear threats. At the very least, if the Kremlin feels threatened, it will display its nuclear sabre to escalate the conflict to a nuclear level others would simply be unwilling to match. During a meeting at the Valdai Club in October 2014, Putin himself gave a history lesson on the power of nuclear intimidation, stating:

True, the Soviet Union was referred to as “the Upper Volta with missiles.” Maybe so, and there were loads of missiles. Besides, we had such brilliant politicians like Nikita Khrushchev, who hammered the desk with his shoe at the UN. And the whole world, primarily the United States, and NATO thought: this Nikita is best left alone, he might just go and fire a missile, they have lots of them, we should better show some respect for them.<sup>128</sup>

The danger in this Russian view is obvious: nuclear brinkmanship could trigger a chain of events that leads to a nuclear confrontation or conflict.<sup>129</sup> Should a confident and “bold” Putin severely miscalculate a NATO response, he could believe nuclear escalation of a conflict to be a viable option.

In addition, if a conflict erupts, Russia’s flexible and discriminate nuclear systems may afford Moscow the ability to frustrate NATO war-planning. By employing specific, specialized systems against high-value target sets, such as aircraft carriers, critical command and control nodes, and long-range air bases, Russia could effectively carry out an offset strategy using both non-nuclear and nuclear means to negate NATO’s conventional superiority by destroying the alliance’s most prized assets. This could cause enormous losses for NATO military personnel and infrastructure, and constrain NATO’s ability to conduct offensive operations to dislodge an occupying Russian force.

As is intended, Moscow’s threat to use nuclear weapons could result in coercive pressure to prevent certain conventional NATO actions during the course of a conflict as well—essentially a form of intra-war nuclear coercion.<sup>130</sup> This could consist of nuclear threats to prevent NATO from targeting supply hubs, air bases, or sophisticated air and missile defenses located just inside Russia’s borders, which could be critical targets during an operation to remove Russian forces. By threatening nuclear escalation, Moscow could force NATO to choose between limiting its response or nuclear war. Thus, NATO must prepare for not just a miscalculated Russian nuclear strike, but a *calculated* one as well.

Finally, should deterrence fail and a crisis escalate, Russian leaders could believe that limited nuclear use would localize and terminate a conflict on advantageous terms, as is suggested by its nuclear escalation strategy. Moscow appears to believe that it can control escalation by restraining the types of nuclear weapons used, their targets, and under what circumstances each weapon is used, while threatening the possibility of further nuclear escalation, up to global nuclear war. Essentially, by credibly threatening to break the long revered nuclear taboo, Russia appears to anticipate being able to coerce NATO into submission or acquiescence to Russian domination of the post-Soviet space. In short, Russian nuclear strategy envisions the threat of and possible employment of nuclear weapons to achieve military and political objectives. As Sergei Ivanov once told the state Duma, “As regard to use of nuclear weapons in case of aggression, of course [we will use them in this case]. What else were they built for?”<sup>131</sup> *The Times* of London reported in April 2015 that retired Russian generals, who had been briefed by Ivanov and approved by Putin, met with a group of retired U.S. generals and warned that if NATO builds up its forces in the Baltics, Russia would respond by increasing its “nuclear posture” and that, “Russia will use its nuclear weapons against NATO.”<sup>132</sup>

However, the core of Russia's nuclear strategy does not appear to anticipate a general nuclear war with NATO. The Kremlin appears to believe that NATO's greatest strength is also its most exploitable weakness: dependence on unanimity among its 28 members.<sup>133</sup> Following the great Chinese strategist Sun Tzu's teaching on the value of disrupting an enemy's alliances, Russian limited nuclear use threats appear intended to divide NATO by threatening greater destruction and loss should the bloc fail to yield during a conflict. The Russian leadership appears to assume that French, British, American, and German leaders will be divided in their willingness to risk nuclear retaliation over distant regions such as Warsaw, Narva, or Daugavpils. As U.S. Amb. Robert Joseph has noted, "Russia's doctrine assumes an *asymmetry of interests* and a *lack of willingness* on the part of the enemy to risk nuclear war (emphasis added)."<sup>134</sup> A fundamental component of Russia's nuclear strategy is to challenge NATO's resolve.

Indeed, the Russian leadership has seemingly come to see limited nuclear threats as a viable policy option specifically fashioned to challenge NATO, based on the presumption that most NATO members ultimately will be unwilling to defend their Eastern-most allies in the face of Russian nuclear escalation threats.<sup>135</sup>

## Conclusion

The Russian leadership undoubtedly views nuclear weapons as an essential coercive instrument to accomplish both political and military objectives related to securing Moscow's goals. By developing a spectrum of nuclear threats and capabilities, and a strategy to employ nuclear weapons, Russia clearly backstops its expansionist campaigns. Whether it be covering hybrid operations, intimidating European states, or potentially employing nuclear strikes to defeat a conventionally superior adversary, nuclear weapons and the threat of their use are likely to remain, if not grow, in importance for Russia. In short, Russia's nuclear strategy is in line with the Putin regime's worldview and grand strategy discussed in Chapter One, the goal of which is to establish a new Eurasian security order based on Russian hegemony at the expense of NATO, and more importantly, the United States.

More disturbingly, the Kremlin appears to believe that actual nuclear employment is a realistic option in support of expansion. Should Putin determine a major confrontation probable, he could conclude that launching a limited nuclear strike would be an advantageous option. Given Putin's apparent propensity for risk-taking and his absolute desire to reestablish a greater Russia, he could find himself in a situation where he greatly miscalculates either his own forces' abilities or NATO's willingness to capitulate. If Russia's nuclear exercises are an indication, the threat of Russian nuclear first use is real in a European contingency that is itself the result of Russian expansionism and aggression.

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## Chapter 5. Russian Arms Control Noncompliance in its Strategic Context

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### Introduction

Russian arms control behavior, including the desire to limit U.S. military capabilities through legally binding agreements while violating those agreements when convenient, is an element of Russia's overall strategy for accomplishing Moscow's expansionist goals outlined in Chapter One. Russia sees arms control, including noncompliance with its treaty obligations, as a tool to be employed as necessary to obtain military advantage, convey strength, compel respect as a superpower, deter Western challenges, enhance its freedom of action and leverage over others, and bolster the regime's respect and domestic legitimacy by demonstrating toughness and a willingness to confront the West. Moscow views arms control not as a cooperative activity to create a more benign world. It is another arena in which to reinforce President Putin's statement that, "It's best not to mess with us."<sup>1</sup>

Too often there is a tendency in the West to dismiss individual Russian arms control violations as mere "technical" violations that are not "militarily significant." This approach ignores the broader role that arms control and a policy of arms control noncompliance play in helping Russia to achieve its strategic objectives and the military capabilities possible as a result of noncompliance.

Soviet/Russian arms control violations generally are not accidents, one-time incidents, misunderstandings or legitimate disputes concerning the technical meaning of treaty obligations. More often, they are directly related to Russian military objectives, which in turn are related to achieving foreign policy goals such as: 1) recovering Russia's great power status through enhanced nuclear capability; 2) extending its sphere of influence over (i.e., dominating) former Soviet space by enhancing Russia's political and military power in Europe; 3) constraining U.S. military capabilities; and, 4) undermining NATO's will and capability to resist. If an arms control commitment—either legal or political—comes to interfere with an important Russian objective, it is simply ignored. Significantly, Russia has violated arms control agreements even when it was clear the violations would be detected.

### Divergent Views, Divergent Outcomes

Arms control has played a far different role in U.S. national security policy than it has in Soviet/Russian security policy. The U.S. has long viewed arms control as a way to promote cooperation and reduce the probability and destructiveness of conflict. The prevailing U.S. view, since it was first stated by then-Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in 1967, was that nuclear arms control was in the interest of both parties, not a zero-sum game.<sup>2</sup> The Soviet Union (and Russia today) never accepted this premise. The Soviets, as accurately characterized by renowned British strategist Dr. Colin Gray, behaved in "a fairly crudely combative way."<sup>3</sup> They generally resisted arms control limitations and intrusive verification regimes, except when they could be used to achieve net greater constraints on the U.S., negate U.S. technical advantages or impact U.S. force structure. As a declassified 1978 CIA intelligence assessment stated, the top



Soviet leadership “worked consistently to ensure that SALT [Strategic Arms Limitation Talks] does not significantly hinder implementation of ongoing Soviet strategic programs.”<sup>4</sup>

The Soviet Union sought military advantage (sometimes with the assistance of negotiating deception),<sup>5</sup> because it viewed arms control as a “political struggle.”<sup>6</sup> As noted earlier, Soviet/Russian views about nuclear weapons are completely different from the prevailing view in the United States, and this has impacted the contemporary Russian approach to arms control and compliance. As Russian journalist Pavel Felgenhauer has pointed out, a proposal for “significant nuclear disarmament is unacceptable to the Russian military and coming from an American president it is regarded as a cynical ploy to gain total military superiority over the country.”<sup>7</sup>

The Soviets were successful in avoiding significant numerical limitations in the SALT I and II nuclear arms control agreements of the 1970s. When they saw an advantage in doing so, the Soviets ignored limitations in the agreements. The Soviet strategic force went from 2,300 nuclear warheads when the 1972 SALT I Interim Agreement (characterized at the time as a “nuclear freeze”) was concluded to 5,500 when SALT II was signed in 1979 and reached 8,000 warheads by 1985.<sup>8</sup> U.S. negotiating concessions facilitated this; however, treaty violations and circumventions by the Soviets also contributed in a significant way.

The Reagan administration shifted U.S. policy from negotiated limits on future growth to actual nuclear arms reductions.<sup>9</sup> This policy was criticized by arms control enthusiasts who mistakenly predicted it would fail.<sup>10</sup> The Reagan and George H.W. Bush era agreements—the INF Treaty, START I and START II (which never entered into force)—were substantially more restrictive than the “cosmetic” SALT agreements of the 1970s and incorporated comprehensive verification regimes.

The ability to implement national strategy is in part affected by economic conditions, and economic factors have also played a role in Russia’s arms control behavior. For example, the decade of the 1990s was a period of economic difficulty for Russia. Consequently, Moscow could ill afford the cost of developing new programs in contravention of existing arms control accords, and the magnitude of Russian arms control violations in the 1990s was less than during the prior decade.

As the Russian economy improved and petrodollars flowed more freely into the Russian economy under Presidents Medvedev and Putin, opposition to nuclear reductions strengthened and substantive arms control violations ensued. Today, Russia is financing an extensive nuclear modernization program, including the development and deployment of systems that violate existing treaties.

In the New START Treaty negotiations, Russia successfully sought higher warhead numbers, permissive counting rules, and reduced verification.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, during the treaty ratification process, the Russian Defense Minister announced that Russia intended to *increase* its nuclear forces under New START.<sup>12</sup> Today, more than half-way through the New START Treaty reduction period, Russia has increased its nuclear warhead and delivery system numbers in all New START-accountable categories (i.e., deployed warheads, deployed delivery vehicles, and deployed and non-deployed delivery vehicles.)<sup>13</sup> Moreover, some Russian programmatic decisions announced since 2011 appear to be efforts to circumvent the New START limit on

deployed warheads by deployment of rail-mobile ICBMs (not counted in the treaty) and procurement of more Tu-160 bombers.<sup>14</sup>

Since the conclusion of the New START Treaty in 2010, Russia has adamantly refused to consider further reductions in strategic nuclear weapons or limitations on tactical nuclear weapons.<sup>15</sup> In 2013, then-Deputy Prime Minister (now Kremlin Chief of Staff), Sergei Ivanov stated: “When I hear our American partners say: ‘let’s reduce something else,’ I would like to say to them: ‘excuse me, but what we have is relatively new.’ They [the U.S.] have not conducted any upgrades for a long time. They still use Trident [missiles].”<sup>16</sup> He said that because of the asymmetry in U.S. and Russia nuclear modernization programs, “There is no reason for Russia to join a new round of arms reduction.”<sup>17</sup> Ivanov’s comment underscores the Russian view that the purpose of arms control is to constrain U.S. military programs, not Russian.

While Moscow’s circumvention of arms control agreements has been extensive, so has blatant noncompliance with substantive constraints. When necessary to achieve important Russian objectives, treaties are treated as “scraps of paper.”<sup>18</sup> With the exception of the Reagan administration’s termination of U.S. observance of the SALT I and II Treaties in response to multiple Soviet violations, there has been no obvious, substantive U.S. response to Russian noncompliance. In fact, U.S. officials often appear to have been reticent to challenge Russia on its violations or to act contrary to treaty obligations, fearing this would provoke Moscow and undermine other areas of potential cooperation.<sup>19</sup> The compliance asymmetry also reflects the fact that the United States respects international law while Russia does not. Moreover, Russian secrecy facilitates cheating, and Russian cheating is an element of Russia’s grand strategy.

The current Russian nuclear buildup, augmented by arms control violations, plays a key role in Russia’s unprecedented efforts to intimidate Europe through nuclear threats—which go well beyond past Soviet efforts during the Cold War. As Alexander Baunov of the Carnegie Institute has noted: “The Soviet Union may have produced thousands of tanks and deployed SS-20 missiles on its European territory, but its ruling elders didn’t chatter blithely about war. The Soviet propagandist would never have said, ‘We can turn the U.S. into a heap of radioactive ashes.’”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, unlike today, it is inconceivable that a senior Soviet official would have threatened to overfly a NATO nation in a Tu-160 nuclear bomber.<sup>21</sup>

## **The Realities of Russian Arms Control Noncompliance**

Soviet and Russian arms control violations have been extensive and deliberate, involving all major existing arms control agreements. In 1985, President Reagan informed the Congress:

The Administration’s most recent studies support its conclusion that there is a pattern of Soviet noncompliance. As documented in this and earlier reports, the Soviet Union has violated its legal commitments to the SALT I ABM Treaty and Interim Agreement, the SALT II agreement, the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, the Geneva Protocol on Chemical Weapons, and the Helsinki Final Act. In addition, the U.S.S.R. has likely violated provisions of the Threshold Test Ban Treaty.<sup>22</sup>

The demise of the Soviet Union did not fundamentally change Russia’s arms control or compliance behavior. In 2015, the House Armed Services Committee noted:

According to the testimony of senior officials of the Department of State, the Russian Federation is not complying with numerous treaties and agreements, including the INF Treaty, the Open Skies Treaty, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Vienna Document, the Budapest Memorandum, the Istanbul Commitments, the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, the Missile Technology Control Regime, and the Russian Federation has recently withdrawn from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE).<sup>23</sup>

Russia's ignoring the CFE Treaty, which is intended to constrain the deployment of military forces in Europe, illustrates the linkage between Russia's arms control behavior and its overall strategic objectives. It has particular significance in light of the current European security crisis resulting from Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Even before Moscow "suspended" its obligations under the CFE Treaty in 2007, it had been in violation of its terms. Indeed, Russia actually admitted it was in violation of the CFE Treaty as long ago as 1999.<sup>24</sup> In March 2015, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov said, "This treaty (CFE) is dead and there are no prospects for reviving it."<sup>25</sup> A month later Anton Mazur, the head of the Russian delegation at the Vienna talks, noted that although "Russia formally remains [a] party of the CFE Treaty... there will be no return to the treaty."<sup>26</sup> In reality, there is of course no legal basis for failing to comply with a treaty while remaining a party to it.<sup>27</sup>

By increasing the level of forces arrayed against Europe, Russia's violation of the CFE Treaty has enhanced its military potential against NATO. As Pavel Felgenhauer noted, Putin's 2007 rationale for "suspension" of Russia's CFE obligations "sounds more like the first blasts of a renewed cold war," allowing Russia to avoid "[i]ntrusive CFE inspections [which] could have provided prior notice of Russia's preparations to attack Georgia."<sup>28</sup>

### **A Lack of Public Transparency**

Most Americans remain unaware of the full extent of Russian arms control noncompliance because there have been no comprehensive, unclassified U.S. government assessments since January 1993. U.S. law [22 U.S.C. 2593a.(a)(6)] requires "a specific identification, to the maximum extent practicable in unclassified form, of each and every question that exists with respect to compliance by other countries with arms control, nonproliferation, and disarmament agreements with the United States." With one exception in 2005, this legal requirement appears to have largely been ignored since 1993. The 2005 State Department compliance report documented Russian violations of major provisions of the START Treaty's verification regime, but its discussion was limited to issues that were active that year.<sup>29</sup> The next compliance report was not issued until 2010. It revealed that the United States had raised additional START Treaty compliance issues since the 2005 Report,<sup>30</sup> but did not identify these issues other than that some of them involved verification. Consequently, the general public has lacked access to information that would allow an understanding of Russia's pattern of noncompliance.

The Obama administration has acknowledged that the most common Russian violations of the START Treaty involved the verification regime, including warhead counting inspections.<sup>31</sup> As serious as these violations were, more significant apparent violations involved the substantive limits in the Treaty.

For example, one of the most significant START violations appears to have been the Russian failure to eliminate 22 SS-18 heavy ICBM silo launchers annually for over three years in the 1990s.<sup>32</sup> According to Russia's own START data declarations released to the public by the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, at one point Russia had deployed 28 more heavily MIRVed SS-18s than were allowed under the START Treaty.<sup>33</sup>

Another apparent START Treaty violation that will shape Russian strategic nuclear forces for decades to come involved the testing of the single warhead SS-27 (*Topol M* Variant II) ICBM with multiple independently-targetable (MIRV) warheads from 2007 through the expiration of the START Treaty in 2009. Through these tests, Russia developed (and now reportedly has deployed) a MIRVed version of the single warhead SS-27. Russia appears to have given this missile a new designator and name (RS-24/*Yars*) to conceal the START violation under the rubric of a "new type" of ICBM.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the disinclination of multiple U.S. administrations to publicize Soviet/Russian arms control violations, these violations were so extensive that every currently deployed Russian ICBM arguably violated the arms control treaty that was in effect at the time it was built. The SS-19 ICBM (still operational) violated the U.S. interpretation of a key provision of the SALT I Interim Agreement on Strategic Offensive Forces concerning the permissible size of a "light" ICBM, thereby allowing its permissible payload or throw-weight to increase by about 350 percent.<sup>35</sup> In 1979, then-Secretary of Defense Harold Brown pointed to the SALT II prohibition on more than one "new type" of ICBM as being one of the most important provisions because it would restrict Russia to minor changes in all but one of its new ICBMs.<sup>36</sup> Though SALT II never legally entered into force, it was in effect under a mutual agreement of a "no undercut" policy. Nevertheless, the Soviets ignored these constraints. The Reagan administration concluded that the Russian SS-25 mobile ICBM (still currently deployed) was a prohibited second new type of ICBM under SALT II. This was confirmed by Soviet unclassified data on the missile given to the U.S. in accordance with the verification provisions of the START Treaty.<sup>37</sup> The Soviet SS-18 Mod 5 heavy ICBM (still deployed) was a prohibited third new type of ICBM under SALT II.<sup>38</sup> It is still the most lethal ICBM in the world, in part because of arms control violations that allowed Russia to increase its destructive potential. As noted above, Russia also violated the START Treaty prohibition on increasing the number of warheads on its SS-27 ICBM, which is becoming the mainstay of the Russian ICBM force.

There is evidence to suggest the warheads carried by these Russian ICBMs were developed by Soviet nuclear testing at yields that violated the Threshold Test Ban Treaty and, after the demise of the Soviet Union, apparently with very low-yield hydronuclear testing.<sup>39</sup> Reports of Russia conducting low-yield hydronuclear tests have appeared in the Russian press since the 1990s.<sup>40</sup> The Russian press also reported that President Boris Yeltsin's April 29, 1999 decree on nuclear weapons development approved "hydronuclear field experiments."<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the bipartisan Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States stated, "Apparently Russia and possibly China are conducting low yield tests."<sup>42</sup> Senior Russian officials have acknowledged that Russia is developing and introducing new and improved types of nuclear weapons.<sup>43</sup> According to Russian expatriate Pavel Podvig, an expert on Russian strategic forces, the new Russian nuclear warhead for its *Bulava*-30 SLBM has three times the yield-to-weight ratio compared to late Cold War Soviet warheads.<sup>44</sup> If true, such a development would have been

difficult without some form of testing, in possible violation of the Threshold Test Ban Treaty, and/or very low-yield testing.

When viewed in their totality, these violations reflect the greater importance the Soviet Union and now Russia place on acquiring and preserving nuclear capabilities than on treaty compliance. The apparent U.S. reluctance to acknowledge fully the scope of Russian noncompliance likely reflects a concern that doing so would call into question the basic premise that Russia shares the West's conception of arms control as a cooperative means of ensuring a stable balance of power and that Moscow can be a reliable strategic partner in doing so.

### **Russian Violations of the INF Treaty and the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs)**

Russian violations of its legal obligations under the INF Treaty and its political commitments under the 1991-1992 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs) involving tactical nuclear weapons are consistent with Russia's grand strategy of seeking military advantage over the West, enhancing Moscow's freedom of action, challenging the U.S., and seeking to drive a wedge between the U.S. and its NATO allies. The INF Treaty and the PNI commitments involving tactical nuclear weapons both abolished entire classes of nuclear weapons; however, Russian noncompliance has made the elimination of these weapons one-sided, as only the U.S. has abided by its legal and political commitments. In effect, Russia appears to be modernizing a class of weapons that were supposed to have been "eliminated." What has been eliminated instead is the countervailing in-kind U.S. deterrent that existed during the Cold War.

**INF Treaty Violations and Circumvention Issues.** In 2014, the Obama administration concluded that Russia was violating the INF Treaty, calling this "a very serious matter."<sup>45</sup> It determined "that the Russian Federation was in violation of its obligations under the INF Treaty not to possess, produce, or flight-test a ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) with a range capability of 500 km to 5,500 km, or to possess or produce launchers of such missiles."<sup>46</sup>

This is not a mere "technical" violation—it goes to the heart of the Treaty.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, it represents a considerable potential threat to U.S. forces in Europe and NATO, and Far Eastern allies. According to a Department of State official, "The Russian system is a state-of-the-art ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) that Russia has tested at ranges capable of threatening most of [the] European continent."<sup>48</sup> Congressman Mac Thornberry (R-Texas), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, has stated, "Russia's development of intermediate-range nuclear platforms is designed to hold our interests at risk and enable Putin's expansionist policies."<sup>49</sup>

Russian press reports of a cruise missile in violation of the INF Treaty date back to 2007; however, this violation was unacknowledged publicly by the U.S. until 2014. *New York Times* correspondent Michael Gordon noted that "by the end of 2011, officials say it was clear that there was a compliance concern."<sup>50</sup> Yet, from 2011 through 2013, the Obama administration simply asserted, "The Parties to the Treaty last met in the Special Verification Commission in October 2003. There were no issues raised during this reporting period."<sup>51</sup> This created the erroneous impression of Russian compliance, undermined opportunities for a U.S. response, and likely encouraged further Russian noncompliance.<sup>52</sup>

Open Russian press reports have identified other prohibited or questionable INF Treaty-related activities unaddressed in the Obama administration's unclassified compliance reports, raising additional questions about Russia's overall adherence to the treaty.<sup>53</sup> These include:

- Deployment of the R-500 cruise missile;
- Development of a second prohibited cruise missile;
- Development of the RS-26, an intermediate-range missile masquerading as an ICBM (a possible violation or circumvention of both the INF Treaty and the New START Treaty);
- Non-declaration of the late Soviet-era *Skorost* IRBM;
- Modification of surface-to-air missiles and ABM interceptor missiles to provide a surface-to-surface nuclear attack role;
- The reported 600-1,000-km range potential of the *Iskander-M* ballistic missile and the range of a new version of the missile; and
- Possible deployment of a new missile called the *Oka* (an SS-23) replacement.

The RS-26 *Rubezh* is the most important of these issues. It appears to be an intermediate-range missile masquerading as an ICBM to avoid the INF Treaty prohibition.<sup>54</sup> Russia's claim that it is an ICBM is based on its announcement that the first successful launch went to just over ICBM range with a single warhead—5,600 km.<sup>55</sup> All three of the subsequent flight tests, however, reportedly went to INF range and at least two carried MIRVed warheads, according to the Russian Defense Ministry.<sup>56</sup> (The third test apparently went to INF range but was not officially announced and its payload is unknown.)<sup>57</sup> The RS-26 appears not to have enough range to be a true ICBM (i.e., target the U.S.), although it will be able to target all of Europe.<sup>58</sup> It reportedly will become operational this year and go into serial production in late 2015 or early 2016.<sup>59</sup>

During the 1988 ratification of the INF Treaty, senators asked the Reagan administration whether a single test of a missile to ICBM range and all subsequent tests to INF range would be a violation of the INF Treaty. Assistant Secretary of State Ed Fox characterized the Reagan administration's interpretation of the Treaty as follows: "...if the test at strategic range was with a configuration (booster, stages, post-boost vehicle, RVs [reentry vehicles]) that is unlike that used for remaining tests of the system at INF range, the configuration tested to INF range would be considered a new missile in the INF range and prohibited by the Treaty."<sup>60</sup>

The INF Treaty was the first arms control agreement subject to the so-called "Biden condition,"—named after then-Senator Joseph Biden—which prohibits reinterpretation of the meaning of a treaty. In light of the Biden condition, the RS-26 appears to be a violation based on the Reagan administration's interpretation of the issue at the time (although the Reagan administration also stated it reserved the right to make its decision on a case-by-case basis). The Obama administration has not characterized it as such, arguing "The recent test of a new type of Russian ICBM, as announced in the Russian press, was notified and conducted consistent with the requirements of the New START Treaty; it was not subject to any provisions or restrictions under the INF Treaty."<sup>61</sup> Whether the RS-26 ballistic missile is a violation or a circumvention of the INF or even the START Treaty,<sup>62</sup> it can substitute for Soviet SS-20 IRBMs which were eliminated by the INF Treaty.

The Obama administration has not identified the cruise missile being tested in violation of the INF Treaty or whether it has been deployed. Russian press reports appear to identify it as the R-500,

which apparently is deployed. In August 2012, *Interfax-AVN* reported serial production of cruise missiles for the *Iskander* system, which reportedly carries the R-500.<sup>63</sup> In June 2014, *Ria Novosti* (now *Sputnik News*), said the Russian Army “currently uses” its *Iskander-M* and *Iskander-K* missiles.<sup>64</sup> The *Iskander-K* is another name for the R-500.<sup>65</sup>

In June 2015, Under Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller stated, “The R-500 is not the missile that we have determined is in violation of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.”<sup>66</sup> However, the R-500 appears to be too large to be INF Treaty-compliant. Hence, there may be two missiles that violate the INF Treaty, as some Russian press reports have indicated. For example, one report cites the supersonic *Kalibr* as the culprit.<sup>67</sup> Another possibility could be a ground-launched version of the 5,000-km range KH-101/KH-102 air-launched cruise missile.<sup>68</sup>

In 2009, Ilya Kramnik, military correspondent for *Ria Novosti*, first hinted at the existence of a second cruise missile with INF Treaty-prohibited range.<sup>69</sup> In 2014, Pavel Felgenhauer stated that the *Iskander-K* had been “tested at a range of 1,000 km, but...the range could be extended up to 2,000-3,000 km by adding extra fuel tanks.”<sup>70</sup> In light of the way INF Treaty missiles are classified, an extended range R-500 missile would likely be classified as a second type of cruise missile.

There are also Russian press reports that the nuclear-capable *Iskander-M* tactical ballistic missile has a range of 600-1,000 km.<sup>71</sup> In June 2015, the head of the design bureau that builds the *Iskander-M* said that a new version of the missile would complete testing in 2015.<sup>72</sup> Also, in June 2015, the Russian Defense Ministry announced it was developing a new replacement for the *Oka* (SS-23), a missile that was eliminated under the INF Treaty. Deputy Defense Minister Yuri Borisov said the new system would have greater range and accuracy than the Soviet *Oka* system.<sup>73</sup>

In July 2010, Pavel Felgenhauer wrote, “...Moscow plans to covertly quit the 1987 treaty on medium and short-range missiles” because the Russian S-300 and the S-400 air defense missiles, the new S-500 air and missile defense interceptor and the Moscow ABM interceptors are nuclear armed and can function as “dual-use...conventional or nuclear medium- or shorter-range ballistic missiles.”<sup>74</sup> The article also noted that such capability was “demonstrated” in the *Vostok-2010* military exercise conducted in the Far East.

In April 2015, Felgenhauer wrote a second article on this issue, stating that the Russian S-300 system (which Russia is selling to Iran) has a nuclear ground attack capability and a range of “up to 400 kilometers.”<sup>75</sup> *Red Star*, the official newspaper of the Russian Defense Ministry, has reported that Russia has 700 nuclear warheads for the Moscow ABM system and its surface-to-air missiles.<sup>76</sup> Many of the announced deployment locations for the S-400 system are in peripheral locations in Russia where they could be used for nuclear surface-to-surface attacks.

The INF Treaty contains an exception to its prohibition on INF-range missiles to allow for interceptor missiles used “solely” for air or missile defense.<sup>77</sup> However, this exception would not apply if these missiles also had a surface-to-surface role. Absent this exception, long-range ABM interceptor missiles and surface-to-air missiles would be prohibited by the INF Treaty. If what Felgenhauer reports is true, the Moscow ABM system violated the INF Treaty since its first day in force because of the long range of some of its ABM interceptors.<sup>78</sup>

Whether the S-300 and S-400 surface-to-air missiles violate the INF Treaty depends upon their testing history. If the S-500 has a surface-to-surface role, it would be virtually impossible for this 600-km range missile not to violate the INF Treaty once it is fully tested. Testing of the S-500 system reportedly is underway.<sup>79</sup>

Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement after reports of Russia's violation of the INF Treaty became public, which called the violation, "a serious challenge to Europe's security," and, "reaffirms the importance of NATO's nuclear deterrence policy."<sup>80</sup>

The Obama administration says it is studying responses to Russian violation of the INF Treaty; to date no apparent action has been taken.

**PNI Noncompliance.** Of similar significance are reported Russian violations of the 1991-1992 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives involving tactical nuclear weapons. The most important PNI violations appear to be the retention and modernization of battlefield nuclear weapons that Russia had pledged to eliminate by the year 2000. These weapons can support Russian coercive threats of nuclear escalation and threaten NATO's capability to defend itself against Russian aggression. They include nuclear artillery, short-range nuclear missiles, and nuclear land mines.<sup>81</sup>

There is also open source evidence that Russia is violating its PNI commitment not to deploy routinely nuclear weapons on naval ships other than ballistic missile submarines and not to develop new types of nuclear sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs).<sup>82</sup> The *Kalibr*, which some Russian publications say is also a prohibited GLCM, is a new nuclear capable SLCM.<sup>83</sup> This represents a serious threat to NATO navies as well as ground forces, as the missiles have a land-attack capability.

In 2004, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Stephen Rademaker voiced Washington's concern that Russia "has not fully met its commitments [the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives or PNIs] to reduce tactical nuclear weapons in Europe."<sup>84</sup> In 2015, Russia announced a decision to produce at least 50 more Tu-160 nuclear bombers, despite its PNI pledge not to do so; it had earlier reportedly produced a few Tu-160 bombers contrary to its political commitment.<sup>85</sup>

Despite Russian violations, the U.S. remains in full compliance with its PNI commitments, thus creating an asymmetric balance that eliminates in-kind deterrence options. In the context of an increasingly dangerous security situation in Europe caused by Russian aggression and explicit nuclear threats, violations of the INF Treaty and the PNI commitments assume even greater political and military significance.

### **New START Compliance Issues**

Russian compliance behavior under the 2010 New START Treaty is open to question. The Senate's New START resolution of ratification requires an annual report on the "details on each Party's reductions in strategic offensive arms."<sup>86</sup> As of the 2015 New START compliance report, Russia has made no reductions. Indeed, as noted above, the number of Russian strategic weapons and delivery vehicles has actually increased.



The 2015 State Department New START report reaffirms what has been stated in the previous reports: “[The] United States has raised implementation-related questions with the Russian Federation through diplomatic channels and in the context of the Bilateral Consultative Commission (BCC), these discussions were ongoing as of December 31, 2014.”<sup>87</sup> However, these unclassified reports have never revealed what compliance issues have been raised. In 2014, Brian McKeon (then a senior NSC official and now Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy) stated that in September 2010 the Senate had been informed of an issue that “implicated possibly New START, possibly INF.”<sup>88</sup> However, the details of this issue remain publicly unknown.

Russia has also talked about giving non-strategic weapons a strategic nuclear capability. In 2012, the commander of the Russian Air Force stated that the Su-34 long-range strike fighter would be given “long-range missiles...Such work is under way and I think that it is the platform that can solve the problem of increasing nuclear deterrence forces within the Air Force strategic aviation.”<sup>89</sup> This cannot be done legally without declaring the Su-34 a heavy bomber, an unlikely prospect because it would subject the Su-34 fighter force to the numerical limitations and the verification regime of the New START Treaty. Thus, this suggests another possible Russian attempt to violate the New START Treaty.

Another example is the Backfire bomber (Tu-22M3), the longest range non-strategic bomber in the world (it is actually part of Russian strategic aviation and is being modernized.)<sup>90</sup> Russia reportedly is integrating new long-range cruise missiles onto the bomber and has launched the new 700-km range KH-32 supersonic cruise missile from this aircraft.<sup>91</sup> A nuclear-capable KH-32 of such range deployed on the Backfire would make the aircraft accountable as a heavy bomber under the New START Treaty.<sup>92</sup> Russian officials say the Backfire will carry the long-range KH-101 cruise missile.<sup>93</sup> However, the conventional KH-101 and nuclear KH-102 may be the same missile under the New START Treaty because they appear to have the same airframe.<sup>94</sup> Such an action would contravene the New START Treaty.

### **Chemical and Biological Weapons Noncompliance Issues**

Russia has continued the Soviet practice of violating the chemical and biological weapons conventions. Concerning chemical weapons, the 2005 State Department compliance report stated: “The United States judges that Russia is in violation of its CWC [Chemical Weapons Convention] obligations because its CWC declaration was incomplete with respect to declaration of production and development facilities, and declaration of chemical agent and weapons stockpiles.”<sup>95</sup> It also stated that, “The United States judges based on all available evidence that Russia continues to maintain an offensive BW [biological weapons] program in violation of the Convention.”<sup>96</sup> The 2015 report of the House Armed Services Committee noted that senior State Department officials have testified that Russia continues to violate the chemical and biological weapons conventions.<sup>97</sup>

### **Military and Political Implications of Russian Arms Control Noncompliance**

**Theater Nuclear Forces.** Russia’s disregard of its PNI commitment not to produce more Tu-160 heavy bombers will likely increase the number of Russian strategic force warheads by at least 600; yet only 50 of them will count against the New START warhead limit as a result of the bomber

counting rule. Adding this number to the Russian forces that were being projected prior to the announcement of this decision (about 2,500 nuclear warheads, according to the Federation of American Scientists),<sup>98</sup> means that the total number of deployed Russian strategic nuclear warheads could exceed 3,000, or about twice the number accountable under New START.

Russia's policy of noncompliance with its arms control obligations has produced advantages for Moscow that are both militarily and politically significant. The increased level of destructive power resulting from these extensive violations can buttress nuclear threats to the West and nuclear employment in the event of conflict. Left unanswered, these violations may undermine deterrence by strengthening Russia's willingness to assert itself forcefully around the world in ways that openly threaten the United States and allies.

Russia's violation of its PNI commitments on tactical nuclear weapons in conjunction with strict U.S. compliance has given Moscow a near monopoly in battlefield nuclear weapons and a clear monopoly on deployed naval tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. This may further weaken the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent in Europe at a time when it needs to be strengthened in light of Russia's views on the first use of nuclear weapons and their utility in resolving a conflict in Russia's favor.

The risk associated with Russian violation of the PNIs is intensified by Russian violation and circumvention of the INF Treaty. The significance of Russia's near monopoly in battlefield nuclear weapons and monopoly in short-range nuclear missiles in Europe is augmented by the emerging Russian monopoly in intermediate-range conventional and nuclear ground-launched missile capability. Both the INF Treaty and the PNIs eliminated the large in-kind deterrent that NATO had in the 1980s to help deter Russian use of tactical nuclear weapons. Russia has failed to comply with the INF Treaty, a situation that assumes greater relevance in the context of the current European crisis. These nuclear capabilities serve to bolster Russia's nuclear threats relating to the Crimea and Ukraine crises, along with concerns over Russian aggression against a NATO state.

**Conventional Forces.** Russia's violation of the CFE Treaty has allowed it to maintain greater forces along its "flank" areas, which border NATO states, than were permissible under the Treaty. As noted above, this appears to have contributed to the success of the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 and is a manifestation of Moscow's strategic efforts to recover its past hegemonic position while intimidating Western powers from taking strong counteractions. In this context, it can be seen how Russia's treaty violations contribute to the attainment of its strategic goals and objectives.

**Nuclear Testing.** Russian nuclear capabilities reportedly may also be improving via covert, very low-yield nuclear testing. Russia reportedly is pursuing advanced low collateral damage nuclear weapons,<sup>99</sup> and Russia's major nuclear weapons design laboratory claims to have developed nuclear explosives that are 99.85 percent clean (i.e., produce very little fallout).<sup>100</sup>

A declassified CIA report from the 1990s concluded that Russian hydronuclear (very low-yield) experiments "are far more useful for Russian weapons development" than the subcritical tests conducted by the U.S. (in which no nuclear yield is produced).<sup>101</sup> Another declassified CIA document linked Russian testing to the development of precision low-yield nuclear weapons;

there is substantial evidence in the Russian press of their development and deployment.<sup>102</sup> This is consistent with the Russian view that first use of nuclear weapons in low collateral damage attacks will result in a Russian victory without provoking the opponent's escalation to large-scale nuclear warfare. These types of limited nuclear capabilities appear to underlie Russian "escalate to de-escalate" military writings, as discussed in Chapter Three. In November 1999, Nikolai Mikhailov, then-First Deputy Defense Minister of the Russian Federation, stated: "The amount of damage should be such as not to provoke the aggressor into escalating the use of nuclear weapons without a justified reason."<sup>103</sup> A declassified CIA report dating from 2000 made this linkage: "Judging from Russian writing since 1995 and Moscow's evolving nuclear doctrine, new roles are emerging for very-low-yield nuclear weapons—including weapons with tailored radiation output..."<sup>104</sup>

Today, the United States observes a "zero yield" CTBT as a matter of policy, despite its rejection by a majority of the Senate in 1999. In 2008, however, then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates assessed the situation as follows: "To be blunt, there is absolutely no way we can maintain a credible deterrent and reduce the number of weapons in our stockpile without either resorting to testing our stockpile or pursuing a modernization program."<sup>105</sup> The U.S. has not resumed nuclear testing and the modernization program that Secretary Gates was referring to, the reliable replacement nuclear warhead, was not funded by Congress.<sup>106</sup> The asymmetry resulting from apparent Russian covert testing and strict U.S. adherence to a zero-yield "no test" posture creates advantages for Moscow that complement Russian nuclear strategy.

**Chemical and Biological Weapons.** In the areas of chemical and biological weapons, Russian noncompliance with the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) may have allowed Moscow to retain weapons capabilities that the U.S. has foregone. These weapons can be devastatingly lethal and their use against Western conventional forces could significantly degrade their ability to fight. In addition, the threat and/or use of these types of weapons can terrorize civilian populations and shut down normal societal functioning in unprotected areas, potentially contributing to mass civilian migrations to avoid CW or BW threats.

## **Conclusion**

Russian arms control violations are a normal and now predictable part of Russian practice. This arms control behavior is not ad hoc, accidental, or exist in a vacuum. It is linked to Russian military doctrine and force posture goals, which in turn are linked to Russian foreign policy goals. Russian noncompliance is directed, at least in part, toward achieving military advantages that could help to intimidate NATO states in peacetime and potentially defeat them in wartime.

Specifically, the capabilities acquired by Russia as part of its noncompliance activities help facilitate and enable multiple goals, including: 1) recovering Russia's great power status (enabled by the fear of its nuclear capabilities); 2) extending Moscow's sphere of influence and domination over former satellite states (resulting from the enhancement of Russia's military power); 3) constraining U.S. military capabilities (exacerbated by creating monopolies in areas where arms control has reduced or eliminated Western deterrent capabilities); and 4) constraining NATO's will and ability to counter or defend against Russian expansion by the threat of nuclear escalation.

Apparent covert Russian nuclear testing is a prime example of this. Russian nuclear weapons are a key element of Moscow's defense policy and are seen as the basis of Russia's great power status. Russian nuclear doctrine holds that controlled and discriminate first use of nuclear weapons will "de-escalate" a conventional war. Covert Russian nuclear testing may help Russia realize such nuclear capabilities.

Also largely overlooked in today's debate is the significance of Russian noncompliance with chemical and biological weapons treaties. Critically, Russian noncompliance may have given Moscow a monopoly on biological and chemical weapons in Europe that it could use or threaten to use in the event of a major war.

Noncompliance with arms control agreements is certainly not the sole reason for the quantitative and qualitative growth of Soviet/Russian strategic forces. It has, however, contributed substantially to that growth. The military and political significance of Russian arms control violations has largely been ignored in the West. The military advantages are quite considerable, especially when viewed in the context of continuing reductions in Western nuclear and military capabilities. Moscow's extensive treaty violations may increase both the prospect of conflict and its consequences. Further, its violations have provided Russia with key military capabilities that are highly relevant to the current European security crisis, particularly in Russian eyes. "Global norms" against nuclear, chemical or biological weapons use may not impact Russian behavior in crises or conflict any more than "global norms" against violating treaty obligations or invading other countries and annexing their territory have prevented Russia from doing so.

In 1982, President Ronald Reagan rightly stated: "Simply collecting agreements will not bring peace. Agreements genuinely reinforce peace only when they are kept. Otherwise, we are building a paper castle that will be blown away by the winds of war."<sup>107</sup>

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## Chapter 6. Russian Strategy: Expansion, Crisis and Conflict Summary and Way Ahead

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### Introduction

The previous five chapters have explored contemporary Russian grand strategy, objectives, capabilities and corresponding actions. This chapter will summarize that discussion and offer initial thoughts about its implications for the United States and allies.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has a worldview that differs substantially from that of his Western counterparts and a grand strategy to expand Russia's power and control—necessarily at the expense of others. Putin's worldview is evident in his statement that the collapse and breakup of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century. Russia, in his view, was humiliated in the wake of that devolution. He views the West as the culprit and a continuing threat to his vision for Russia. Putin has often used powerful and even spiritual imagery to convey his messages to the Russian people. For example, in his 2014 annual address to the Russian Federal Assembly, Putin cited the religious significance of Crimea—the place where “Grand Prince Vladimir [born in Kiev circa 956 AD] was baptized before bringing Christianity to Rus.” And, he compared the significance of Crimea and Sevastopol to Russia to the “sacral importance” of the “Temple Mount in Jerusalem for the followers of Islam and Judaism.”<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Putin and other like-minded Russian leaders appear determined to correct perceived injustices done to Russia. This revisionist agenda is to be accomplished at the expense of the West—in particular, the United States and allies. The evidence for this thesis is apparent from consistencies in Russian leadership statements and Russia's behavior over the past 20 years. As summarized by Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter in October 2015:

Russia has used political, economic, and military tools to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighboring countries, flouted international legal norms, and destabilized the European security order by attempting to annex Crimea and continuing to fuel further violence in eastern Ukraine.<sup>2</sup>

**Russian Objectives.** Moscow's grand strategy and identified key objectives include: expanding its influence and reestablishing its global role as a multi-regional great power and “Russification” of the near abroad. U.S. leaders should be aware that these objectives are not achievable in an era of peace and stability, but are highly revisionist and confrontational. Russian actions toward these goals, if unchecked, invariably will lead to further crises and conflict with the West. The territorial expansion which is sought by Moscow has been demonstrated clearly in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, and future incursions by Russian military forces could well erupt into a serious confrontation with the West. In fact, with Putin's invasion of Ukraine and Russian military operations in Syria, Russia has demonstrated the potential threat to states from the Baltic to the Black Sea and the Balkans.

Russia has declared repeatedly that it views NATO as its enemy and large-scale military exercises conducted over the past decade have underscored the seriousness of that Russian perspective of NATO. Russia's expansion of influence and military buildup is not limited to its

western flank. Its military activities in the East—for example, in the Kamchatka Peninsula and the Kuril Islands—have understandably alarmed Japan, a key U.S. ally in the Pacific.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in 2014, Russia's military seizure of the Crimean Peninsula and military forces in eastern Ukraine prompted a phone call between Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and U.S. President Obama. According to reports, the two leaders agreed that Russia's actions were "a threat to international peace and security."<sup>4</sup>

**Instruments of Power.** In order to further its objectives, Russia has used its multiple instruments of power—military, diplomatic, economic, and Information Warfare (IW)—in an increasingly sophisticated/integrated way in recent contingencies. For example, in the three cases examined—Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine—Moscow has exploited the declared need to intervene and protect enclaves of ethnic Russians who, after the breakup of the Soviet Union, found themselves living in other countries. To varying degrees, these newly independent countries were pulling away from the influence of Moscow. Also in the case studies cited, domestic repression and the employment of IW and Information Operations (IO) were used relatively effectively to incite to action those inclined to side with Russia, to communicate internationally a narrative intended to provide a rationale for Russia's subsequent actions, and to threaten/intimidate those that might oppose those actions. Threats included both direct military threats as well as economic threats, such as the cutoff of energy supplies.

Russian involvement in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine has displayed consistent uses of these elements of power. Moscow has improved its execution with each successive incursion. As noted earlier in this report, the evidence is clear that Russian military operations in Georgia and Ukraine were not improvisations, but planned military incursions reflective of Moscow's grand strategy to dominate the post-Soviet space. While this behavior by Russia's leaders may have come as a surprise to Western audiences, representatives from current U.S. allies that were previously members of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact have a different perspective. They recently reminded their NATO allies that territorial expansion and aggression has been a consistent aspect of Russian behavior.<sup>5</sup>

The direct use of military power was threatened in the Moldova example and, in the case of Georgia, was limited and demonstrated poor military performance. However, by the time of its 2014 military operations against Ukraine, Moscow had corrected some of its most blatant military deficiencies and operational performance improvements were evident in Russia's military actions in Ukraine and Crimea.

Russia is still rebuilding its conventional forces, which currently are no match for the collective might of NATO's forces. However, Moscow has opted to try to deter any meaningful military interference from the West by threatening nuclear first use as well as by acting quickly to achieve a *fait accompli* before NATO's slow-moving, deliberative decision-making processes have time to unify and generate any substantive response. Putin seems to understand that, in general, most European states would prefer to avoid confrontation with Russia. In order to further seed disunity among NATO members and others, prolific IW/IO actions are employed to provide a rationale for Russian actions that will be believed by some, help blunt any emerging criticisms of Russian actions, and intimidate and silence those who might openly disagree with Moscow.

Russian military incursions, media propaganda and threats appear to be part of a long-term psychological war against the will and endurance of the West. Moscow's threats and actions are intended to compel other governments to acknowledge Russia's position as a major power broker and hegemon in the former Soviet sphere of influence. In addition, Russia has been forming partnerships with like-minded states, including China, and more recently Syria and Iran,<sup>6</sup> to oppose Western interests and form a power bloc to compete with the West.

**Russian Threats.** Direct Russian threats and other expressions of hostility against the West have been prolific. Any country willing to host a U.S. missile defense site—Poland, for example—is faced with numerous threats that it would then become a target for Russian nuclear forces. A September 2015 news report claiming that a relatively small number of U.S. B61 tactical nuclear bombs currently stored at an air base in Germany would soon be exchanged for a like number of upgraded B61s from the United States was met by heated Russian rhetoric. Russian expressions of hostility included the baseless claim that this exchange would be a “violation of the strategic balance in Europe” and would demand a Russian response.<sup>7</sup> One threatened response was the deployment of nuclear-tipped *Iskander* tactical missiles to the Kaliningrad exclave. Of course, security analysts who watch Russian actions closely have commented that Russia likely has already taken this action, perhaps as early as 2013.<sup>8</sup>

**Military Exercises.** As noted earlier, Putin has boasted openly of his military potential saying, “If I wanted, Russian troops could not only be in Kiev in two days, but in Riga, Vilnius, Tallinn, Warsaw or Bucharest, too.”<sup>9</sup> From 1999 to the present, Russian military exercises have provided visible evidence that Moscow considers the United States and NATO as its enemy and is preparing for military conflict—even nuclear, if necessary. Since then, these messages have been communicated numerous times by Russia's conduct during large-scale military exercises close to the border of NATO's Baltic and Central European states. One exercise even included an amphibious landing in an area that was described as representing Poland's northern coastline. In some cases, ostensibly to underscore the severity of the intended threat, Russian military exercises reportedly have included the simulated use of nuclear weapons.

**Role of Nuclear Weapons.** The public version of the Russian military doctrine of nuclear first use to “de-escalate” a conflict appears to be a key element of Russia's psychological warfare and coercive strategy. To ensure that the West understood that Moscow considered the newly annexed Crimean Peninsula as part of the “homeland,” Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, in July 2014, stated publicly that Crimea had become Russian territory and, therefore, was covered by Russia's military doctrine regarding threats to its territory.<sup>10</sup> Western leaders have not sought confrontation with Russia's Putin, but to avoid conflict. Unfortunately, this ad hoc response to Russian misbehavior may be seen in Moscow as a lack of will in the West to oppose such intimidation and territorial grabs.

Russia's grand strategy, including its nuclear modernization strategy, is not limited to deterrence that is defensive in nature. Russia envisages and prepares for aggression against neighbors to revise post-Cold War boundaries and spheres of influence while deterring any effective NATO response, including with nuclear first-use threats.

Indeed, Russia's military doctrine essentially states that Russia's relative weakness in conventional weapons and forces vis-à-vis the West will be compensated for by modernized

nuclear forces. There are numerous public statements by Russian leaders declaring the importance of modern nuclear weapons and that the modernization of Russian nuclear forces is their highest defense priority. A robust nuclear modernization agenda, routine nuclear threats against the West, and a first-use nuclear “de-escalation” doctrine make Russian nuclear threats a focus of its strategy. Taken cumulatively, Russian nuclear weapon developments over the past 15 years paint an ominous picture that, after decades of Western optimism in this regard, must be taken seriously.

Moscow’s robust nuclear modernization programs and military exercises demonstrate that statements in its public military doctrine are not hollow, but are being supported by concrete actions. This extensive modernization program has continued unabated even as Western economic sanctions have taken a toll on the Russian economy. Below is a listing of Russia’s current nuclear modernization programs:

- Reported Russian nuclear modernization and development programs for its ICBM force include the following:
  - development of a new, liquid-fueled heavy ICBM which will eventually replace the SS-18 in the 2018-2020 timeframe. Each of these new ICBMs reportedly will be able to deliver 10 to 15 nuclear warheads;
  - modernization and life extension of SS-18 and SS-19 ICBMs which will remain in service until replaced by more modern weapons;
  - production and deployment of road-mobile ICBMs which include the single-warhead missile, the *Topol-M*, and the multi-warhead missile, the RS-24 *Yars*; also the development of another solid-motor, road-mobile, multi-warhead missile, the RS-26 *Rubezh*; and
  - the announced development of a new rail-mobile ICBM called *Barguzin*.
- Reported modernization of Russia’s strategic bomber force includes:
  - existing Tu-160 and Tu-95MS strategic bombers that are being modernized extensively;
  - new production of an advanced version of the Tu-160 which would be capable of carrying a new assortment of cruise missiles and other weapons;
  - the announced development of a new type of strategic nuclear bomber with the goal of production by 2023; and
  - declared plans to develop and produce a new stealth bomber, designated PAK-DA, which is scheduled to enter service in the 2023-2025 timeframe; this stealth bomber could possibly carry a hypersonic weapon, now in development.
- Russia’s sea-based leg of the strategic nuclear triad is also being modernized, reportedly including:
  - continued production of Russia’s most modern type of *Borei*-class SSBN, each of which can carry 16 *Bulava* SLBMs; reports state that each missile will be able to carry 6-to-10 nuclear warheads; and
  - development of other improved SLBMs, including the RSM-54 *Sineva* missile and the *Liner*; both can be deployed on existing Delta-IV-class SSBNs.

**Nonstrategic Nuclear Forces.** In addition to its extensive modernization program for strategic nuclear forces, Russia apparently is enhancing its inventory of non-strategic or tactical nuclear weapons (NSNFs). Russia appears to have abandoned its Presidential Nuclear Initiative (PNI) commitments to eliminate or significantly reduce many types of these weapons and, other than restrictions under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (which Russia is violating), these weapons are not limited by any formal treaty. The ground-launched *Iskander-M* missile is just one example of Russia's NSNF modernization. Other modernization programs reportedly include air-delivered nuclear weapons and sea-based nuclear weapons.

With this history of its public military doctrine, robust nuclear modernization programs underway, and highly visible military exercises involving simulated nuclear weapon use, Russia's nuclear threats and forces provide cover for non-nuclear military operations meant to expand Russian territory and dominance as mandated by Russia's grand strategy. Under this nuclear cover, Moscow's actions are designed to enlarge its sphere of influence and intimidate former Soviet clients, and warn them against drawing closer to the European Union and NATO.

**Arms Control.** Russia's arms control agenda clearly plays a role in supporting Russian grand strategy. Russia seeks to limit U.S. military capabilities through legally binding agreements while, at the same time, violating those agreements when doing so furthers important Russian capabilities. As noted earlier, Russian violations are not accidents or minor technical misunderstandings, but calculated decisions to further Moscow's objectives.

Cheating on arms control agreements appears to be a part of Russia's overall strategy. According to reports from Congressional hearings in April 2015, Russia is not complying with a significant number of formal treaties and other commitments. The list of agreements for which Russia is not in compliance includes treaties and agreements on nuclear forces, such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Treaty (INF) and the PNIs of 1991 and 1992, as well as treaty regimes/conventions for chemical and biological weapons.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the bipartisan Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States reported in 2009 that Russia was "apparently" conducting low-yield nuclear tests, in violation of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the United States has fully complied with the provisions of those nuclear agreements and the U.S. strict "zero yield" interpretation of the CTBT is a restrictive interpretation that is not defined in the treaty and which other signatories apparently do not share. This asymmetry between the United States and Russia regarding compliance with nuclear arms treaties is decidedly one-sided. Russian noncompliance provides unique military benefits to further Russia's nuclear weapons programs while the United States maintains full compliance with restrictive treaty interpretations. In this asymmetric relationship, the United States must take special, sometimes costly, steps to reassure nervous allies and develop effective counters and responses to Russia, which possesses the largest nuclear arsenal in the world.

In addition, Russia's negotiating strategy leading to the New START Treaty, signed in 2010, appears to have provided unique benefits to Moscow at the expense of the United States. For example, under the provisions of the treaty, Russia has increased—not decreased—the number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads and delivery systems, while the United States has been required to reduce the numbers of its treaty-accountable items. According to DoD's report to Congress on its plans to implement the New START Treaty, the United States will have to spend



over \$300 million dollars just to comply with the reductions, inspections, and demonstrations called for by this treaty.<sup>13</sup>

Also, Moscow has ceased complying with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and has not fulfilled its obligations under the Vienna Documents, the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, and the 1987 Missile Technology Control Regime.<sup>14</sup> In summary, Russia has used noncompliance with treaties and other agreements to give itself an advantage in developing, building, and deploying both nuclear and conventional weapons that support Russia's expansionist grand strategy.

In summary, considerable available evidence supports the thesis that Russia's current leaders have a worldview that Russia—the rightful heir of the once powerful Soviet empire—has been greatly wronged by, and is now threatened by the West, and this perceived condition needs to be rectified, even if at great risk and a steep price. A grand strategy to restore lost influence and power has been part of a Russian pattern of behavior for well over a decade. Consistent use of Russia's elements of power are evidenced in Russian behavior in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine. And, as of this writing, the struggle in Ukraine continues, and Russia is building up and employing its military capabilities in Syria.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps of greatest concern is the fact that this revisionist agenda is being acted out under the umbrella of prolific nuclear threats against any state that might resist forcefully. Moscow's actions seem determined, and the comprehensive Russian nuclear modernization agenda lends credibility to Russia's declared military doctrine regarding potential nuclear use. Russia's modern non-strategic nuclear weapons appear suited to its limited nuclear first-use doctrine to "de-escalate" a crisis. Further, Russia's muscular strategic nuclear force seems intended to deter any serious response from the West to its threatened limited nuclear use. And, as noted, Moscow's arms control strategy and pattern of non-compliance provide asymmetrical advantages for Russia in executing this strategy.

## **A Way Ahead**

**Post-Cold War Assumptions Regarding Russia Are Wrong.** Three U.S. post-Cold War presidents—Clinton, Bush, and Obama—have eagerly extended to Russia opportunities for cooperation in the hope that Moscow would become a constructive partner in global affairs. Fundamental U.S. planning assumptions have included: (1) the Cold War is over; (2) Russia is a shadow—militarily and economically—of the Soviet Union; (3) military competition between Russia and the West would not be a serious concern for the foreseeable future; and, (4) Russia would comply with arms control treaties. For example, the 2001 Nuclear Posture Review conducted in the first year of the George W. Bush administration had as a key planning assumption that Russia was no longer an enemy.<sup>16</sup> In October 2015, General Philip Breedlove, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, said that for nearly two decades the U.S. intelligence community has treated Russia as a potential ally, not an adversary, and that the U.S. decision making has reflected that view.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the Obama administration famously attempted to engage Russia in a constructive and cooperative manner with its "reset" strategy. All three post-Cold War presidential administrations have reached out to Russian leaders in various ways and, until now, have given priority to the pursuit of cooperative relations with Russia and to developing military capabilities and plans for contingencies *other than those involving conflicts with Russia*.

**Need to Rethink the U.S. and NATO's Relationship with Russia.** In early September 2015, an editorial in the Russian journal, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, stated that Russian Strategic Rocket Forces have conducted "two large-scale exercises which in essence reject the well-known thesis that in a nuclear war, there cannot be a victor." Furthermore, the editors stated, "Russia is preparing for victory in a nuclear war," a shift that is undoubtedly intended to intimidate the West and at best represents a dangerous escalation of rhetoric.<sup>18</sup> Russian defense analyst, Alexander Golts, tried to capture the lack of a comprehensive response by the United States and its allies to Russian aggression, "The West cannot seem to switch gears and understand that the new Cold War is here to stay."<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, past U.S. planning assumptions that focus on a cooperative relationship between Russia and the West have proven to be invalid, and the U.S. and NATO must now revise those past assumptions and adjust to new and disturbing realities. Both U.S. and NATO leaders have stated so publicly. On May 27, 2015, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg gave a presentation in Washington, D.C. on contemporary security challenges for NATO. Stoltenberg spoke on the need to adapt to the changed security environment and warned:

The challenges we see coming from the east are clear, and they are coming from a resurgent Russia. Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea and its continued destabilization of Ukraine have brought armed conflict back to Europe. This conflict has already cost over 6,000 lives. There are continuous ceasefire violations, and heavy fighting could flare up at any moment. ... But we cannot look at Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine in isolation. They are part of a disturbing pattern of Russian behaviour that goes well beyond Ukraine.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, in June 2015, during a visit to Poland, Gen. Breedlove spoke publicly about his concern that Russia was not behaving as a responsible nuclear power. He is reported to have stated that, "rhetoric which ratchets up tensions in a nuclear sense is not a responsible behavior."<sup>21</sup>

In July 2015, several senior U.S. military leaders stated that Russia is the top threat to U.S. national security,<sup>22</sup> and in August, 2015, U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter stated that Russia is a "very, very significant threat." Carter referred to Russia under Vladimir Putin as "an antagonist" and called this a new development that "we need to adjust to and counter."<sup>23</sup>

**Bottom line.** Despite widespread Western expectations of a post-Cold War cooperative relationship, Russia's grand strategy and actions cannot be dismissed as mere bluster for domestic consumption or as insignificant flights of fancy. Overall, Russia's goals and behavior appear to be a formula for further crises and conflict with the West. Of greatest concern is the prospect of misunderstanding, overreach, and escalation, whether intended or unintended.

Recent Russian actions are already changing the calculus of other countries and this dynamic is undermining U.S. efforts toward a stable international order. What, therefore, should the United States do in response to contemporary Russian grand strategy with its corresponding hostile actions toward the United States and its allies? In particular, what should the U.S. prepare to do to deter further Russian acts of aggression and to respond to those actions that are not deterred?

**Competing Narratives on the Way Ahead.** Two distinct and competing narratives have been offered regarding how the United States should respond to the series of recent Russian incursions. One commentary suggests that Russian military operations, in Syria for example, are “not worth a lot of worry” and that, “The portrayal of Vladimir Putin as a grand chess master, shrewdly rebuilding the Russian empire through strength and wiles, is laughable.”<sup>24</sup> The general rationale underlying this narrative is that Russian strategy and its execution reveals incompetence among Russia’s top leaders that will collapse as the result of the increasing burdens on an already sick Russian economy and corrupt bureaucracy. The conclusion of this narrative is that the United States need not take actions to shore up its position—military and other—relative to Russia. One such assessment calls the existing U.S. advantage “gigantic” and concludes that: “The United States does not need bold action to shore up its gigantic advantage relative to Russia. It only needs to allow Putin to keep on blundering. It also does not need to engage in a costly arms race, given doubts that Russia can live up to its own military modernization targets.” And, “Instead of struggling to cobble together a response to Russian hybrid warfare, NATO should do very little in response.”<sup>25</sup>

A driving concern behind this minimalist approach is the specter of provoking Russia and the potential for nuclear escalation. A strong U.S. response to Russian aggression—such as Russian seizure of some portion of Baltic territory—would incur “the costs of conventional fighting” as well as “the risk of a nuclear exchange.” A strong response to a Russian attack, “would come as a terrifying shock to Russian leaders” who might “lash out in anger and frustration rather than seeking some way of limiting the damage.”<sup>26</sup> As evidence of this potential danger, proponents of this narrative point to the Russian doctrine of nuclear first use. These proponents, by their own logic and recommendations, validate obvious Russian hopes that the West will be deterred from action by Russia’s nuclear threats.

The issue that this position raises, of course, is whether relative Western restraint inspires Russian moderation or the greater exploitation of opportunity. Available evidence suggests the latter. To wit, how much more, how much longer, and whom else should the West be willing to give up to Russian expansionism in the hope of avoiding further conflict? Will further Western passivity simply create greater dangers? As Winston Churchill famously said of Neville Chamberlain’s choice of conciliatory policies during the late 1930s, “You were given the choice between war and dishonor. You chose dishonor and you will have war.” Regarding the potential for future incursions by Russian military forces, noted Russian defense journalist Alexander Golts, commented, “Unfortunately, the West’s lack of resolve could embolden Moscow toward further adventurism.”<sup>27</sup>

A much different narrative is suggested by those who consider Putin and other Russian leaders as more resolute and skillful, learning from and building upon past actions that further Russia’s apparent long-term goals. According to one analysis, Russia changed its tactics in Ukraine four times within a year until it found a winning strategy.<sup>28</sup> Russian actions have already derailed any prospects of NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine and returned the Crimean Peninsula to Russian rule. These achievements by Putin are wildly popular with most Russians. According to one report in mid-2015, Putin’s approval ratings at home were 80-to-90 percent.<sup>29</sup> Putin’s track record of using force and violence to further his political goals may be considered crude and outdated by many in the West, but Moscow’s persistence, coupled with extremely limited Western opposition, has furthered its strategic agenda, and has generated great concern among America’s

allies. For example, in November 2015, the Polish Foreign Affairs Minister, Witold Waszczykowski, exclaimed that with Russian threats looming, Poland cannot tolerate a situation in which half of Europe (i.e., those countries near Russia), are insecure.<sup>30</sup>

Proponents of a more active response to Russia point to the relative increase in Russian defense spending, even while Moscow is dealing with its current economic crisis. Reportedly, defense spending in 2015 is estimated at 4.2 percent of GDP, up from 3.4 percent in 2014.<sup>31</sup> This view of Russian persistence and determination leads to a call for a much more active U.S. strategy to deter and respond to further Russian aggression. Such proponents question the premise that Putin is incompetent and the current Russian strategy will become benign in response to Western passivity or collapse on its own.

**Allied Anxiety.** In the wake of Russia's military adventurism in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, U.S. allies—especially those NATO allies in Central and Eastern Europe—have expressed increasing anxiety over their security. In Lithuania, for example, which borders the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, apparently takes quite seriously the prospect of a Russian invasion.<sup>32</sup> According to one account, a business leader in Lithuania lamented, "I won't live to see the day when Russia is no longer a threat."<sup>33</sup> Residents of other Baltic states, Latvia and Estonia, appear to share similar concerns.

A September 2015 report summarized the views of 22 security professionals and analysts in Estonia and Lithuania. According to that report, most believed that the NATO alliance is moving in the right direction with its Readiness Action Plan in response to potential Russian aggression elsewhere, but that the pace of implementation needs to be accelerated. In addition, they expressed anxiety over "Russia's nuclear saber rattling rhetoric and military exercises in which nuclear weapons were used to restrain NATO's conventional forces." Among potential scenarios of concern is the possibility that Russia would threaten the Baltic States in order to convince the United States to back down in a conflict elsewhere.<sup>34</sup>

As noted, leaders in Poland also have expressed concern over their security and have called on NATO to deploy more troops to Eastern Europe and establish new, permanent military bases in the eastern region of NATO. According to one report, Poland's president, Andrzej Duda, declared, "We don't want to be the buffer zone. We want to be the real eastern flank of the alliance."<sup>35</sup> Putin's actions clearly have caused NATO's eastern members to worry about the validity of NATO's security guarantees,<sup>36</sup> and have served notice to Russia's neighbors that friendly relations with the West would come at a price.

In August 2014, Matthew Kroenig, Senior Fellow at the Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security, and Walter B. Slocombe, former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy for President Clinton, authored an Atlantic Council report on the relevance of nuclear deterrence for NATO. They concluded that threatened NATO allies want NATO's military, including its nuclear forces, to be so strong that Russia is effectively deterred from any acts of aggression against them. Regarding the views of these allies, they wrote about the need for a NATO deterrence counter-strategy:

An ultimately successful conventional defense [of eastern European allies against Russia] is likely to entail huge costs, especially to the immediate target of the aggression, and take

a long time. The likely immediate victims, which could conceivably include the Baltic states or Poland, might therefore prefer that Russia be deterred not only by the prospect of conventional defeat resulting in their [i.e., NATO members] potentially delayed and destructive “liberation,” but also by the possibility that a Russian attack would be met by early nuclear strikes by the United States or other allies.<sup>37</sup>

**Potential for Future Conflict.** As sanctions by the West impose economic hardships on Russia, some observers have suggested that Moscow may consider further conquests to try to demonstrate that Russia’s actions eventually result in a strategic victory, instead of a humiliating defeat.<sup>38</sup> The report summarizing the views of security professionals in Estonia and Lithuania, mentioned earlier, stated that these leaders shared the view that “letting Putin’s actions go unanswered was seen as certain to invite new aggression.”<sup>39</sup>

Unless a fundamental change occurs in Russian leadership and strategy, conciliatory actions by the West to avoid confrontation seem likely to present an image of weakness and irresolution, and thereby invite further Russian expansionist policies and belligerence. How then should the West begin to formulate its response to this potential threat? In particular, how should the West neutralize the Russian threat of nuclear first use to “de-escalate” a conflict? Recent reports analyzing Russian incursions have not dealt in a comprehensive manner with this issue. Commentators typically propose either to proceed cautiously and avoid confrontation because of Russian nuclear threats or match Russian threats and actions.<sup>40</sup> Developing a comprehensive strategy to combat Russia’s nuclear first-use strategy is a critical, albeit complex undertaking. A first step is to outline the myriad objectives of an effective strategy to be employed by the United States and allies to confront and negate this threat. The discussion below offers an initial broad outline of suggested objectives for this important first step.

## **U.S. Objectives in Response to Russian Nuclear Threats**

Any strategy considered by the West to respond to and counter threatened nuclear use by Moscow, should emphasize several objectives.

**Assure Allies and Friends.** While the assurance of allies and deterrence of foes are related functions, the assurance of allies likely requires measures separate from and in addition to those needed to deter foes. The United States will need to assure all of its allies, especially NATO allies in Central and Eastern Europe, that U.S. security guarantees are credible and backed by resolute commitments as well as strong military capabilities. In particular, U.S. and NATO leaders need to take steps to bolster the credibility of NATO’s Article V commitment and to ensure that it is non-negotiable. For this commitment to be credible to the most threatened allies, actions will need to be much more than temporary or symbolic in nature. In June 2014, the Polish news weekly *Wprost* reported that the Polish Foreign Minister was quoted as saying that the alliance with the United States was “not worth anything ... even harmful because it creates a false sense of security for Poland.”<sup>41</sup> If accurate, such views must be addressed effectively to preserve the foundations of alliance.

The United States will also need to take the lead in working constructively with a variety of countries—including friends that are not covered by formal mutual security alliances with the United States and for which the U.S. nuclear umbrella has not been extended formally. Such

countries include: Sweden, Finland, Ukraine, Georgia, Jordan, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and others. Effective U.S. assurance efforts will help establish a sense of confidence, cohesion and unity of purpose among U.S. friends and allies.

**Deter Further Russian Aggression.** Russian leaders have routinely issued nuclear threats against U.S. allies and friends whose actions displease Moscow. Moreover, Russia's aggression has been conducted under the cover of Moscow's public doctrine of nuclear first use. Therefore, a key aspect of a U.S. deterrence strategy should be to communicate credibly to Moscow that neither nuclear threats nor nuclear use, even limited use of nuclear weapons, could possibly result in an outcome that would be tolerable for Russia.

Elements of an effective deterrence strategy for this purpose would likely include the following:

- a credible declaratory strategy: an effective declaratory strategy must communicate to Moscow the existence of firm "red lines" that would demand a forceful and inevitable U.S. and allied response;
- relevant offensive and defensive capabilities that are visible, credible, and consistent with U.S. declaratory statements;
- deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial: since the decision calculus of Russian leaders may not be evident and may change over time based on a variety of issues (e.g., stakes, context, domestic concerns, etc.), the U.S. strategy to deter and supporting force posture should be comprehensive, adaptable and robust;<sup>42</sup>
- forward-deployed defensive capabilities and prompt response capabilities and plans to prevent a *fait accompli*: the intent is to preclude a rapid Russian success such as its seizure of Crimea. Improved and expanded defensive capabilities, rapid response offensive capabilities based in Central and Eastern Europe, and a robust exercise program would likely be valuable in this regard;
- threatened loss of assets valued highly by senior Russian decision makers: the West's deterrence strategy need not be entirely defensive. Russian actions against U.S. allies should warrant a credible threat to highly valued assets; and
- uncertainty for Moscow over just how, where, and with what capabilities (including military, diplomatic, economic, cyber, and space) the West might implement its response to Russian provocations.

**Credible and effective response options.** In a future contingency, if Russian behavior against allies is not deterred, symbolic U.S. actions alone following Russian actions could be highly counterproductive. Failure to respond promptly and forcefully in a way that eliminates or diminishes Russian gains would signal that the West lacks resolve to meet its security obligations, stand up to aggression, and employ its capabilities in support of stability and order. Such a signal would likely invite alliance collapse and further provocations from an expansionist Russia. Should Moscow test the resolve of U.S. deterrence and assurance commitments to its allies, response options should be timely and effective. In addition, the United States and NATO must communicate to Moscow that the West has its own strategy to limit escalation and damage.

Currently, the United States and NATO possess highly effective and integrated conventional military capabilities. Regarding nuclear capabilities, however, the comparison of NATO with Russia is quite different. Moscow has embarked on a comprehensive nuclear modernization

agenda while the West has dramatically reduced its nuclear forces and, as a policy, has eschewed any new nuclear capabilities. Russia's modernized nuclear capabilities, including its reported low-yield and low-collateral-damage nuclear weapons, lend credibility to Moscow's military doctrine of limited nuclear first use. Perhaps most importantly, Russian leaders appear to believe to some extent that these capabilities will allow Russia to sidestep the U.S. nuclear deterrent. As such, the West's static nuclear capabilities—somewhat modernized versions of Cold War-era weapons and low profile nuclear exercises—may signal to Moscow's leaders that the West is not prepared to engage in a regional confrontation that threatens to escalate.

**Deter Escalation.** If the United States and its Western allies are to develop a strategy and capabilities to deter future Russian aggression and nuclear first-use threats, that strategy will also need to include options and capabilities to deter escalation. Escalation control is not a term that has been commonly used in the post-Cold War environment. Some may even view the term as an anachronism from the 70's and 80's. However, if the United States is to assure its allies, and prepare to deter and respond to further Russian aggression, a 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to escalation control must be part of the strategy. Moscow will need to know that the United States and its allies are prepared to counter Russian threats to NATO countries and other friends and allies, including Russian nuclear first-use threats. To be credible and effective, this strategy is likely to require the development of a range of defensive and offensive capabilities, including nuclear capabilities.

If Russia is determined to see the use of nuclear threats as a trump card that only Moscow holds, then the West must plan and make obvious deterrence, response, and escalation control options that are credible and particularly tailored to Russian leaders. Failure to develop an effective strategy to counter Russian nuclear threats would likely be extremely dangerous and lead to further instability. Russian leaders may see their own rhetoric as validated, and allies of the United States may chart plans for their own security, independent of the United States.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Russia has been at work in executing its grand strategy to expand its territory, power and influence, and to restore the standing lost when the Soviet Union disbanded. In the conduct of this strategy, Russian military incursions are being conducted under the cover of Moscow's nuclear threats and other intimidation tactics intended to support Russian expansionism. These threats are backed by an extensive nuclear modernization program involving both strategic and tactical nuclear weapons.

In the near term, Russian leaders may not intentionally provoke a conflict that could evolve into an extended conventional war with NATO. NATO's conventional military capabilities, once they are moved into positions for their employment, would likely dominate. However, the devastation from a conventional conflict between NATO and Russia would likely be horrific for the countries involved and to the unity of the NATO alliance. And should Russian nuclear first use occur, the potential for further escalation would be a very realistic concern. U.S. and NATO planning and capabilities must be designed to deter such conflicts and, for those contingencies for which deterrence may not be feasible, facilitate escalation control and damage limitation. Developing a comprehensive strategy to deter further adventurism by Moscow, assure allies, limit damage, and control escalation is a topic worthy of further serious study and analysis. Western leaders and

publics have for two decades believed that such concerns were distant Cold War memories. Given Russia's strategic goals and unprecedented nuclear first-use threats, however, a reexamination of U.S. and NATO nuclear policies and deterrence postures is now necessary. Continuous and detailed analyses of these issues was the focus of Western strategic thought during the Cold War, but has notably been lacking or dismissed for decades. Given Russia's grand strategy and recent actions, it is apparent that the need for such strategic thinking did not end with the Cold War. Indeed, it is an urgent and critical task in the unfolding environment.

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*Russian Strategy: Expansion, Crisis and Conflict*, takes a comprehensive and clear-eyed look at contemporary Russian goals, instruments of power and military operations. It presents a sobering report: the divergence between our hopes and expectations for the post-Cold War world and the stark realities of Russian strategy could not be more disturbing. According to General Philip Breedlove, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, for most of the past two decades US intelligence has treated Russia as a potential ally and US decisions regarding Russia have reflected that view. Given what we now know to be true, to continue on that path would go down in history as a monumental failure of intelligence and leadership.

*John S. Foster, Jr.*

This study is the most comprehensive, detailed, and documented analysis of Putin's strategy and tactics for recreating some semblance of the Russian empire in Eurasia for both offensive reasons, i.e., to expand Russian power, and defensive, even paranoid, reasons, i.e., to shield Putin's feudalistic authoritarian regime from Western influences. Its subjects range from the use of information warfare and political-business corruption to gain influence in former provinces and satellites to the use of nuclear threats to intimidate the West and to deter it from interfering in this project. The presentation of the record of such nuclear threats and the doctrines and weapons underlying them is particularly impressive...and disturbing.

*Fritz W. Ermarth*

Occasionally the United States needs to say what it means, and really to mean what it says. The Article V commitment to common defense in the NATO Treaty of 1949 is precisely one such bearer of good news for World Order, but it is not good news for Vladimir Putin. As this unparalleled and detailed study of contemporary Russian strategy demonstrates so well, good order in Eastern Europe and the northern tier of states in the Middle East is exactly what Russia is targeting today. It is time, if not already rather late for us to say "no further," and to mean it! This study is an important step in that direction.

*Colin S. Gray*

This latest monograph from National Institute presents an abundance of open source evidence, including from many Russian publications. It is persuasive in telling us that the prevalent Western post-Cold War hopes and expectations that Russia would be a cooperative partner in world affairs cannot stand against the reality of Putin's Russia. The new reality points inevitably to serious dangers for the Western alliance and the need to reorient US and NATO policies away from their idealistic moorings.

*Robert G. Joseph*

*Russian Strategy: Expansion, Crisis and Conflict* is a powerful and persuasive exposition on Russia's aspirations to secure a "post-Soviet space" or sphere of influence. In the pursuit of that goal, Russia blatantly violates international norms, arms control obligations and international law. Exhaustively researched by long-time experts on Russia's foreign policy, strategy and force structure, the authors provide extensive details and examples of Russia's revisionist goals and policies. Here is a compelling case that Russia is striving for dominance via a combination of military (conventional and nuclear), political and economic tactics, often referred to as "hybrid warfare," and violations of its legal obligations. This is a realistic and stark picture, one that will require a new deterrence message and new capabilities to effectively counter. It is an important contribution to our understanding of contemporary Russia.

*Guy B. Roberts*