Anton Holoborodko

Know as “little green men,” Russian soldiers stand watch over Pervalne military base in Crimea. (March 2014)

Assessing and Addressing Russian Revanchism

BY JOHN HERBST

The West has been slow to recognize the dangers posed by Russian President Vladimir Putin's revisionist policies. At the Wales Summit in September of 2014, NATO identified the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) as a "grave threat" to its members. While expressing great concern about and condemning Russia's aggressive policy in Ukraine—and noting the various steps taken to deal with the challenges of that policy—the Alliance declined to characterize Russia as even a threat. Indeed, although the Summit statement spoke of the need to provide "assurances" to Allies in Eastern Europe, it did not speak of deterring the Kremlin.

This same reluctance was evident nearly a year later, in the summer of 2015, when General Joseph Dunford testified before Congress as President Barack Obama's nominee to be the next Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Dunford identified Russia as an existential threat. Later that day, however, Josh Earnest, the Presidential press spokesman, said that Dunford's observation "reflects his own view and doesn't necessarily reflect the view—or the consensus—of the President's national security team."[1] The next day Secretary of State John Kerry also stepped in and made clear that he does not view Russia as an existential threat.[2]

Clarity of vision and thought is essential for successful policymaking. Safeguarding European security requires a well-grounded understanding of the capabilities, intentions, and activities of the continent's most powerful military actor.

Moscow's Military Capability and Revisionist Objectives

Russia is one of the world's two great nuclear powers, and its military capabilities are well understood. According to Global Firepower, which evaluates military power around the world, Russia's conventional forces are the second most powerful in the world, after those of the United States. Moscow maintains over 750,000 troops, 15,000 tanks, 750 fighter/interceptors, 1,300 fixed wing attack aircraft, and 350 naval ships.[3] These figures mean that Moscow has the capacity to pose a

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significant threat to Europe and to American interests. This has been duly noted by military leaders. Admiral Mark Ferguson, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe, notes that the "remilitarization of Russian security policy is evident by the construction of an arc of steel from the Arctic to the Mediterranean."[4] He continued, "Starting in their new Arctic bases, to Leningrad in the Baltic and Crimea in the Black Sea, Russia has introduced advanced air defense, cruise missile systems and new platforms."[5] General Phillip Breedlove, the former Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, observed in October 2015 that "our force structure in Europe now is not adequate to the larger Russian task that we see."[6]

Its growing military capacity gives the Kremlin the means to act against U.S. and NATO interests in Europe. But what of its intentions, its policy objectives? Are there reasons for the Kremlin to do so? The Kremlin has not been hiding its national security priorities. Putin has stated on numerous occasions his dissatisfaction with the status quo in Europe and Eurasia established at the end of the Cold War. He has insisted that there must be new rules for the international order, or there will be no rules at all.[7]

The post-Cold War order that Putin finds objectionable has the following characteristics:

- Countries that were subservient to Moscow in the Warsaw Pact pursued independent internal and foreign policies;
- The Soviet Union was dissolved and all of the USSR's constituent republics became independent states. It is important to note that this decision was taken exclusively by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. The West played no part in it, and then President George H.W. Bush even advised against it;
- It was understood that disputes in Europe would be resolved only by negotiations and other peaceful means;
- The tensions and geopolitical competition that characterized 20th century Europe and made it history's bloodiest were a thing of the past;
- To reduce political tensions and to promote prosperity, European integration would continue, including the countries of the former Soviet bloc; and
- Russia and the West were to become partners, with the West seeking closer relations and sponsoring Moscow's memberships in international organizations such as the G8 and the IMF.

Putin, senior Russian officials, and commentators have made their views of the post-Cold War order clear. In numerous statements they have:

- Called for a Russian sphere of influence in the former Soviet space;[8]
- Called Georgia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan failed or artificial states;[9] and
- Asserted Moscow's right, and even duty, to protect not just ethnic Russians, but Russian speakers wherever they happen to reside;[10] (Russian speakers make up about 25 percent of the populations of Kazakhstan Estonia, and Latvia. There are also significant Russian populations throughout the countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union).[11]

Moscow's Policy Instruments

Were Moscow's attack on the post-Cold War order purely rhetorical, it would be problematic, but manageable. Unfortunately, this assault has been comprehensive. It involves Russia's information apparatus, intelligence

services, criminal networks, business community, and military.

The heavily subsidized Russian media has been conducting a virulent anti-Western, and particularly anti-American, campaign for years. Coupled with the increasing control of "independent" elections, Putin's media have fanned xenophobia and intolerance throughout Russia. This campaign has been part of Putin's efforts to reduce the chance that the Russian people are attracted to democratic ideas, and to mobilize the Russian people to support his aggression in neighboring countries.

Russian intelligence services and connected criminal networks play an important part in Putin's efforts to undermine the post-Cold War order. First, we should note that the very organization of Moscow's intelligence agencies provide a clue about its intentions. After the collapse of the USSR, the Soviet intelligence service (KGB) was split in half. The Federal Security Service (FSB) was given responsibility for domestic security, while the External Intelligence Service (SVR) was to focus on foreign intelligence. The fact that the independent states of the former Soviet Union are the responsibility of the FSB tells us what Moscow thinks of their independence. A main responsibility of the FSB—and of the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), Russian foreign military intelligence—is to penetrate the security organs of the neighboring states to ensure that they promote Russian interests as defined by the Kremlin. This includes, as we have seen in Ukraine, making sure that its military, police, and intelligence will not mobilize against a Russian-led insurrection or even invasion.

Corruption, a major feature of Putin's Russia, is also an important tool for the Kremlin in promoting its influence in the Near Abroad. The Kremlin understands that corrupt foreign officials are more pliant. Cooperation between Russian intelligence services and criminal organizations figure here. For instance, a massive scandal in Russia and Ukraine has been the siphoning off of substantial resources from the gas sector into private hands. Shadow companies such as Eural Trans Gas and RosUkrenergo were created to manage this, and it was Semion Mogilevich, a major Russian crime boss, who first devised this strategy.[12]

As he consolidated his power in Moscow, Putin ensured that Russian companies were subject to Kremlin control to promote objectives abroad. The heart of the Russian economy is its gas and oil production. Putin has used these assets to promote his foreign policy in a number of ways. For example, he has built gas pipelines to Western Europe around Ukraine and even ally Belarus so that he can use natural gas trade as a weapon against these countries while maintaining access to his wealthy customers in the West. He has also hired senior European officials to work as front men for his companies. The most egregious example of this is former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, the Chairman of the Board of NordStream, an international consortium of five companies established in 2005 for the planning, construction, and operation of two natural gas pipelines through the Baltic Sea.

Gazprom, Russia's major gas company, has established business practices regarding the transportation of Central Asian gas through its pipelines. It also regulated the delivery of gas to European customers in a way that violates European Union (EU) energy policy and maximizes Russian leverage in dealing with individual countries. For instance, Gazprom practices have made it harder for

European countries to supply gas to Ukraine when the Kremlin wants to punish Kyiv by cutting off the supply of gas. Lucrative arrangements with select companies in some EU countries have also built constituencies that support Kremlin foreign policies.[13]

The Kremlin has also assiduously courted extremist parties in Europe in order to weaken not only democratic practices and support for the European Union's sanctions policies, but also NATO's shift of military resources to its member states in the east. Russian support includes financing of Marine Le Pen's National Front party in France and the Jobbik—Movement for a Better Hungary—party in Hungary.[14]

Additionally, the Kremlin has built up its cyber capacity. There is evidence suggesting that they have deployed it at least twice to demonstrate their unhappiness with the policies of neighbors. In the spring of 2007, after Estonia had taken down a monument which honored the Soviet Union for "liberating" the country from the Nazis, and following demonstrations by local ethnic Russians against the decision, the country faced a massive cyber-attack that many attributed to Moscow.[15] In the winter of 2015-16, a massive cyber-attack shut down the electricity supply in major areas of eastern Ukraine. This followed the shutdown of the electricity supply from mainland Ukraine to Crimea.[16]

Finally, and as discussed previously, Putin has modernized and rebuilt the Russian military and has not hesitated to use it in pursuit of his revisionist objectives in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. U.S. policymakers need to take a stand against revisionism, and Ukraine would be a great place to start

The Origins of Kremlin Revisionism and Its Application

The origins of the war in Ukraine began in the minds of Putin and the Russian security elite who find the post-Cold War order unacceptable. While the broad extent of today's crisis is Putin's responsibility, its roots go back to the imperial thinking in Russian security circles since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In the Russian imperial view, all the territories once ruled by Russia or the Soviet Union should remain subject to the rule or at least the special influence of Moscow. While typically associated with the Russian "power ministries"—the Ministries of Defense and Interior, the FSB, the SVR, and the GRU—even Russian liberals are tempted by this thinking. For example, Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin objected to Ukraine's 1991 referendum, in which 91 percent of the population—including 54 percent in Crimea—voted for independence from the Soviet Union (and Russia). It is worth noting too that when the results of the Ukrainian referendum became clear, these two relatively liberal Russian politicians began to assert Moscow's right to protect Russians in Ukraine—the same "principle" that Putin has been using to justify his recent aggression.[17]

From the very first days of the post-Soviet world, Moscow's security services developed the "frozen conflict" tactic to limit the sovereignty of its neighbors. They supported Armenian separatists in the Azerbaijan region of Nagorno-Karabakh in order to exert pressure on Azeris, South Ossetians, and Ajarians; the Abkhaz in Georgia to pressure Tbilisi; and the Slavs in Transnistria in order to keep Chisinau, the Moldovan capital, in check. For those who mistakenly blame current tensions with Moscow on NATO enlargement, it is

worth noting that Moscow had its frozen conflicts policy in place before talk of the first expansion of NATO.

Russian activity in the Near Abroad in the 1990's was just a prelude to Putin's policies in the area. After the Rose Revolution in Georgia in the fall of 2003, which drove President Eduard Shevardnadze from power, the Kremlin instituted a trade embargo and undertook various military provocations. In late July 2008, Russia's South Ossetian proxies began to shell Georgian positions. A sharp Georgian response gave Moscow the pretext to send in troops in August, which promptly defeated the Georgians.

Led by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Western mediators established a diplomatic process that led to a ceasefire. The United States sent humanitarian assistance to Georgia and, as a caution to Moscow not to send its troops further into Georgia beyond South Ossetia, delivered it via the U.S. military. Moscow did not take the war beyond South Ossetia.

The West imposed no serious penalties on Moscow for its aggression. The White House froze the civilian nuclear act with Russia, and EU members debated as to whether any action should be taken. Finally, the EU decided to suspend talks on a partnership and cooperation agreement.[18] Not long afterwards, President Sarkozy agreed to sell Moscow the Mistral aircraft carrier in part as a reward for its ostensible observance of the ceasefire that he had negotiated. Less than a year after the war, President Obama launched his reset with Moscow. The Georgian war was seen in Moscow as a great victory. Putin had given a bloody nose to Georgia's pro-Western government and suffered only minor and temporary inconvenience in Russia's relations with the West.

Ukraine was the next target of Kremlin revisionism. It is worth recalling that the "Ukraine crisis" began when Putin decided in 2013 that it would be unacceptable for Ukraine to sign a trade agreement with the EU. This prospect had not disturbed him in the past.[19]

Most Ukrainians, including then President Viktor Yanukovych, who was often described as pro-Kremlin (a simplification), wanted the EU deal. Partly due to Kremlin pressure—Moscow had been banning Ukrainian exports—Yanukovych backed away from the trade deal in late November 2013. The next day, there were tens of thousands of demonstrators on the streets of Kyiv protesting this decision. When Yanukovych tried to clear the streets with strong-arm policing, he provoked demonstrations of hundreds of thousands protesting his corrupt and increasingly authoritarian rule. Putin's offers of lower gas prices and a loan of $15 billion did not satisfy the demonstrators.[20] For two months, Yanukovych alternated between police methods and inadequate concessions to persuade the protestors to go home. He failed. Sergei Glaziyev, Putin's principal adviser on Ukraine, publicly urged Yanukovych to use force to deal with the protesters.[21]

Finally, in late February 2014, Yanukovych either permitted or ordered the use of sniper fire to terrorize the protesters into leaving the streets. A hundred people died as a result.[22] But the demonstrators did not leave the streets; they were enraged. Yanukovych's political support collapsed, and he fled the country for Russia a few days later.

In response, the Kremlin launched its invasion of Crimea with "little green men," who looked like and were equipped like

Russian soldiers, but without the insignias and flags of the Russian military. The United States and Europe imposed some mild economic sanctions on Russia in response, while also making every effort in private diplomacy and public statements to offer Putin an "off ramp" from the crisis.[23] That the West had such a tender regard for Putin's dignity was not unnoticed in the Kremlin, and certainly made Putin's decision to launch his hybrid war in the Donbass easier. The Sarkozy model of responding weakly to Kremlin aggression was still in place.

Since launching his decreasingly covert war in Ukraine's east, Putin has escalated his intervention several times. It began in April 2015 with Russian leadership, arms, and money. When Ukraine launched its counteroffensive under newly elected President Petro Poroshenko in June 2015, the Kremlin sent in increasingly sophisticated weapons (such as the missile system that shot down the Malaysian airliner in July 2015), more fighters (including the Vostok Battalion of Chechens), and, finally, the regular Russian army itself in August. Only the use of regular Russian forces stopped the Ukrainian counteroffensive. Throughout this period, the West was slow and weak in confronting the Kremlin. For instance, the G7 leaders had warned Putin in early June that if he did not cease his intervention in Ukraine by the end of the month, Russia would face sectoral sanctions.[24] Yet by the end of June, despite the introduction of major Russian weapons systems into Ukraine, there was no more talk of sectoral sanctions. Only the July shooting-down of the Malaysian passenger jet, along with the invasion by Russian troops, persuaded the Europeans to put those sanctions in place.

VO Svoboda

Damaged building in Kurakhove, Ukraine, 10 miles west of the frontlines in Donbass, November 26, 2014

After regular Russian forces defeated the Ukrainian army in early September 2015, Germany and France helped negotiate the Minsk I ceasefire, which Russia repeatedly violated by introducing more equipment and military supplies into Ukraine and taking an additional 500 square kilometers of Ukrainian territory.[25] This escalated aggression, however, did not lead to any additional sanctions last year.

Despite the Russian offensive that greeted the 2016 New Year, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini was floating the idea of easing sanctions. As the violence increased, Mogherini dropped the subject. But in February, Germany and France helped negotiate a new ceasefire, Minsk II, with terms far worse for Ukraine.[26] Putin certainly enjoyed this process. Again, the Sarkozy pattern was unbroken. For violating Minsk I, Putin received a much more favorable ceasefire, which he promptly violated by seizing the strategic town of Debaltseve. And why not? While Western leaders huff and puff at each new Kremlin aggression, they hope out loud that this is the last one. And occasionally they levy additional sanctions on Russia.

What the West Should Expect Next From the Kremlin

Nowhere has Putin stated clearly what he needs to stop his war against Ukraine. Western leaders have fallen all over themselves offering solutions publicly and privately to assuage the Russian strongman, but to no avail. There is a simple reason for this: Putin's ideal objective in Ukraine is to establish a compliant regime in Kyiv—something that he cannot achieve because a large majority of Ukrainian citizens despise him for his aggression against their country. His minimum objective is to destabilize Ukraine so that it cannot effectively reform itself and orient its policy toward Europe.

Putin has not stated these formally because they are not objectives that he can admit in polite society. But destabilizing Ukraine means that he cannot sit still in the territories that he has already conquered with his proxies. He has to continually stir the pot by military action and/or terrorism and subversion. A good example of terrorism is the bombs that were set off in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, that killed demonstrators at the November 2015 rally honoring those killed by snipers on Kyiv's Maidan Square.

Despite not stating them directly, Putin is not hiding his ambitions. While we do not know precisely when or where he may move next, we do know the candidates. The Kremlin has proclaimed its right to a sphere of influence throughout the post-Soviet space, as well as its right to protect ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers wherever they reside. This would include Kazakhstan, where the Russian-speaking Slavic community comprises 25 percent of its population, as well as Estonia and Latvia, with similarly sized Russian-speaking communities. Furthermore, the sphere of influence includes not only the entire post-Soviet space, but also countries that, while not part of the Soviet Union, were members of the Warsaw Pact.

In August 2014, Putin called Kazakhstan an artificial country created by the genius of President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Putin noted that Russians in Kazakhstan face no ill treatment under President Nazarbayev, but speculated that problems could arise once he passes from the scene. Kazakhstan's Slavs are located along the border with Russia, in areas that contain a good percentage of the country's oil

resources. Just as the West's weak reaction to Moscow's war against Georgia emboldened Putin to strike in Ukraine, so too will a Western-tolerated Kremlin victory in Ukraine endanger the former states of the Soviet Union. Is that an acceptable outcome for Western statesmen?

The danger goes beyond the grey zone whose states do not enjoy membership in the EU and NATO. While never recognized by the United States, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were incorporated into the Soviet Union; two of those states—Estonia and Latvia—have large Slavic communities. A number of serious thinkers and statesmen say that Putin's reach will not extend to the Baltic States because they are members of NATO and thus have Article 5 protection under the NATO Charter. That is, of course, a critical deterrent, but is Putin willing to test this?

Putin has wondered publicly, as have other senior Russian officials, why NATO is still in existence. After all, they opine, it was created to stop the Soviet Union, which dissolved 25 years ago. It is no secret that the Kremlin would like to weaken the alliance (and the EU). And Putin has been playing games in the Baltics designed to do that and to challenge the applicability of Article 5 there. The list is not small. In addition to the 2007 cyber-attack on Estonia, the Kremlin kidnapped an Estonian counter-intelligence official from Estonian territory on September 5, 2014, the day the NATO summit ended and only two days after President Obama's visit to Tallinn. A few weeks later, Russia seized a Lithuanian ship from international waters in the Baltic Sea.

A New Danger to Europe in an Interconnected World

While Europe has been slowly coming to grips with the dangers of Kremlin aggression in the east, it has also faced a serious challenge from the south: instability in the Middle East and North Africa that produces massive migrant flows into Europe. Until the fall of 2015, these two challenges were seen as distinct, and largely unrelated. Putin's September 2015 intervention in Syria has changed that understanding.

Moscow's operation in Syria was designed principally to save the Assad regime, its longtime ally in the Middle East, from falling to various opposition forces, the strongest elements of which were the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other extremist Sunni groups. Only over time did it become clear that this intervention also gave the Kremlin a lever for putting pressure on Europe.

The Kremlin's operation in Syria has been limited largely to air power with some special forces on the ground. While claiming to be focused on the "terrorists"—whom the West identifies with ISIL and the other extremist Sunni groups—the Russians have devoted the vast majority of their attacks to the weaker, moderate opposition forces fighting the regime. Even against this weaker foe, Moscow initially enjoyed only limited success. By the end of 2015, Kremlin airpower in support of Syrian land forces (supplemented by Hezbollah and some Iranian Revolutionary Guards) had barely retaken any territory from any opposition groups. It had, however, stopped the loss of additional territory by the Assad regime.[27]

Only in January 2016, supporting Syrian forces on the road to Aleppo, Syria's largest

city, did the Kremlin operation begin to produce substantial territorial gains. By bombing the towns leading to Aleppo, and then the ancient city itself, Russian airpower inflicted enormous civilian casualties. This was the strategy that Moscow employed successfully to win the second Chechen War in the late 1990s. In leveling Grozny, Chechnya's capital, and other population centers, Moscow finally achieved victory, but only after killing tens of thousands of civilians and turning 25 percent of Chechnya's population into internally displaced persons (IDPs).[28]

By inflicting great casualties on fighters and civilians alike, Moscow's bombing campaign has permitted the advance of Assad's forces. At the same time, this bombing produced another massive wave of refugee flows into Turkey, exacerbating the already serious refugee crisis in Europe that is dominating the political landscape there. This crisis is increasing divisions in the EU between countries that have opposed accepting the refugees (for example, Hungary) and those insisting that all member states must do their share (for example, Germany). It is also empowering hard right parties in Europe that are neither committed to the goal of an integrated EU, nor concerned about Kremlin aggression in Eastern Europe. Finally, it calls into question a signature EU achievement—the Schengen Agreement, which led to the creation of Europe's borderless Schengen Area—as the European nations work out different and, even opposing, responses to the crisis.

The Kremlin's surprise announcement in early March that it had achieved its objectives in Syria and would thus gradually reduce its forces was followed by a renewed emphasis on negotiations between the Assad regime and the moderate and significantly weakened opposition. At the same time, Russian forces remain in the area and continue military operations.

What the United States and the West Must Do

First, Western leaders need to understand the nature of Putin's threat. Buttressed by the world's second most formidable military as well as a large economy, he is intent on upsetting the post-Cold War order. This currently represents the principal threat to global order.

If Western leaders understood that Putin's ambitions extended to the entire post-Soviet space, including perhaps their Baltic NATO allies, they would recognize the West's vital stake in stopping Putin's aggression in Ukraine. They do not want Putin's grasping hand extending to additional countries, particularly Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania, which NATO has an Article 5 obligation to defend. It is very much in their interest to make Putin's life so uncomfortable in Ukraine that he thinks twice about additional aggression.

In addition, Putin's war in Syria has opened a new front in Europe. The West must act promptly and decisively to stop the refugee flows before they destabilize Europe. Here responsibility lies primarily with Washington. With Russia in the game, only the United States has the military power to change the Syrian battlefield in ways that would alleviate the refugee crisis. The possibilities of diplomacy are shaped largely by the relative strength of the contending parties on the ground. The Russian intervention has succeeded in enhancing Assad's military position, which in turn has strengthened his position in Geneva peace talks.

Syria

The Kremlin's announcement in early March 2016 that it had accomplished its mission in Syria and was withdrawing some its forces has not changed the situation on the ground substantially. Significant Russian assets remain and the Russian bombing campaign continues, albeit at a lesser rate. Although a ceasefire has been established, it is not stringently observed and it does not include ISIL and other extremist groups.

In March, the West took important new steps to deal with the migration crisis. The EU's negotiations with Turkey appear to have persuaded Ankara to establish, with EU assistance, better facilities for the refugees which should reduce the flow to Europe.

Yet even with additional aid, Turkey might still find it convenient to permit a good number of refugees to leave the country for the EU. With this in mind, the West could consider taking advantage of the decrease in Russian air operations to establish a no-fly zone and civilian safe haven in northern Syria. Such measures would require American air power and tens of thousands of troops. Potential troop contributors might include France, Turkey, and some Arab states. Yet, even with the reduced Russian air activity, the risk of military confrontation between the two nuclear superpowers raised by pursuing such a course would be substantial.

A second possibility would be to use American military power to balance the battlefield. Moscow's principal aim in Syria is to shore up the Assad regime. It has chosen to do this by massive air attacks on moderate opposition forces—allies of the West—and the civilians among whom they live. The United States could offset this advantage by using its military to destroy Syrian military hardware and to target advancing Syrian, Iranian, and Hezbollah forces, and their supply lines. American forces could use precision missile strikes to achieve most of these objectives, thereby reducing the danger of a direct American-Russian confrontation.

With Russia's veto-power in the UN Security Council, it is doubtful that the United States and Europe could get UN approval for the operation. The EU, however, could give a Europe-wide imprimatur to the operation, while the Arab League could provide a Middle Eastern one. Such an operation would thwart the Russian mission and, crucially, have international legitimacy. It would also give Moscow reason to reconsider its campaign and to agree to a superpower ceasefire in Syria. This would permit the establishment of a civilian safe haven in the country and perhaps open the door to U.S.-Russia-EU cooperation on a diplomatic track to end Syria's civil war. The current diplomatic effort, with Moscow in the lead, flows from Russia's military operation and is aimed at creating a choice between the Assad regime and Islamic extremists. The United States and its European allies have no interest in such a choice.

Ukraine

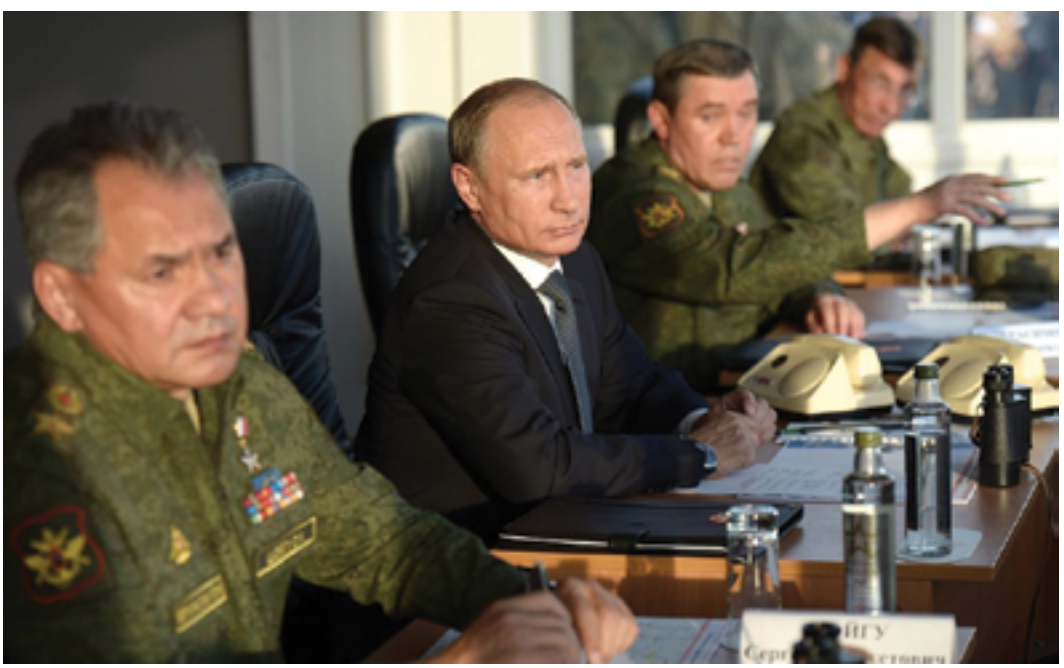
In Ukraine, the West's short-term objectives should be to prevent further Russian aggression, allowing President Poroshenko to reform and develop in peace the Ukrainian lands under his control. The middle-term goal should be to secure both the withdrawal of all Kremlin forces and equipment from the Donbass and the return of Ukrainian sovereignty to the occupied territories, thereby restoring Kyiv's control over its border. It would be preferable if this were accomplished

through the Minsk diplomatic process, but that process is stalled.

To increase the odds that Putin does not move beyond the current ceasefire line, and to persuade him to end the aggression in the Donbass, the West must address his vulnerabilities. He has at least two. First, his implicit deal with the Russian people is that he delivers prosperity and, in return, they leave him alone to run the country. By any standard, Putin has not kept his part of the bargain. The Russian economy is under serious pressure today because of the sectoral sanctions levied in the summer of 2014 by the United States and the EU, coupled with the sharp fall of hydrocarbon prices since the summer of 2015. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) calculated that Russian GDP fell by 3-3.5 percent in 2015 and wages dropped by 9.5 percent; it predicts that the Russian economy will fall another 1 percent in 2016. In private, senior Russian economic officials have said that the drop in 2015 was in fact 4 percent of GDP and 10 percent in wages; they expect the same in 2016.[29]

Sanctions have been renewed several times—on a six month basis—since the summer of 2014. It is essential that they remain in place until Ukraine regains full control of its eastern territories. Russian officials have publicly acknowledged that sanctions have cost the Russian economy 1–1.5 percent of GDP.[30] It would also be helpful if the United States and the EU agreed on new sectoral sanctions to impose if the Kremlin seizes additional territory in Ukraine, for instance the besieged city of Mariupol.

It is important to note that the Obama administration has done a good job; it understands that the key to success is to ensure that both the United States and the EU sanction Russia. Though there may be reluctance in corners of the EU, Washington has worked hard,



Russian Presidential Press and Information Office

Russian President Vladimir Putin and some of his top military brass, including Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu (left)

and largely with success, to impose sanctions in tandem with Europe.

Putin's second vulnerability concerns the use of his army in Ukraine. While his media have conducted an extensive smear campaign against Ukraine and its leadership, they have not been able to persuade the Russian people that Russian troops should be used there. Since the summer of 2015, numerous polls by Moscow's Levada Center have shown that a large majority of the Russian people oppose using troops in Ukraine.[31] Because of this, Putin has denied the presence of Russian troops there, despite strong evidence to the contrary.[32] For example, thousands of regular Russian troops were used in August and September of 2014 to stop Ukraine's counter-offensive.[33] In January 2015, Western intelligence estimates reported that there are anywhere between 250 to 1,000 Russian officers in Ukraine,[34] while Ukrainian intelligence claimed that there are as many as 9,000 or 10,000 Russian troops.[35] Even Putin finally acknowledged in December 2015 that there was "some" Russian military in the Donbass.[36]

Whatever the number of Russian soldiers in Ukraine, casualties are a vulnerability for Putin. He is burying his dead in secret, increasing casualties make this more difficult to do. All this means that the United States should provide significant military aid to Ukraine: $1 billion a year for three years. This should include secure communications equipment, drones, armored vehicles, long range counter-battery radar, and anti-armor systems, like Javelins. By doing so, the United States would assist in deterring further Russian aggression and allow for the stabilization of the rest of the country. Further, providing such equipment would also reduce Ukrainian casualties (over 75 percent of which are the result of missile fire) and increase Russian casualties.[37]

Countering Revisionism Beyond Ukraine

The United States must act in two different geopolitical areas beyond Ukraine to deal with Moscow's revanchist tendencies. Most importantly, the U.S. must act decisively to strengthen NATO and deterrence in the new members of the Alliance, especially the Baltic States. NATO's presence in the Baltics must be sufficient to serve as a tripwire, making clear to the Kremlin that it will defend these countries. During the Cold War, 200,000 U.S. troops served as a trip wire in Germany. Today, NATO needs at least one battalion (400-800 troops) in each Baltic state to serve the same purpose. We also need sufficient military hardware in the Baltic States and forward deployed troops in Poland and elsewhere to reinforce this point.

After a slow start in 2014, the United States and NATO have taken substantial steps toward establishing this deterrence posture. In June 2015, U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter announced during a European tour that the United States would preposition tanks, artillery, and other military equipment in Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, and the Baltic States.[38] Early in 2016, the Pentagon announced that it would quadruple spending on the European Reassurance Initiative to $3.4 billion.[39] These resources should be used to ensure that there are at least two properly equipped battalions in the Baltic States.

Even with these measures, however, NATO must take three additional steps. First, it must finally approve a contingency plan for "hybrid war" in the Baltic States. Secondly, it should cover both national and Alliance responsibilities in case of the appearance of

Kremlin provocateurs among the Slavic population of Estonia or Latvia. This plan should also include contingencies for small provocations, such as the kidnapping of the Estonian intelligence official, as well as a plan for dealing with cyber-attacks such as the one experienced by Estonia in 2007. Finally, NATO should conduct a formal review of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, which was premised on the outdated notion of Russia as a partner of the West.

The second area that requires a new policy is the grey zone in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia where Moscow claims a sphere of influence. Do Western policymakers believe that Moscow has a right to order things in this area as it chooses, regardless of preferences of the other states? If not, the United States, NATO, and the EU need to consider measures that will strengthen these countries. Some are relatively simple. Countries interested in a stronger U.S. and/or NATO security connection, for instance, would certainly welcome more American or NATO military visits. For Georgia, that might mean increased port visits by a more active NATO in the Black Sea. In Central Asia, it could mean more CENTCOM visits to Uzbekistan. The United States might also enhance cooperation with all interested Central Asian states to offset the potential destabilizing impact of its withdrawal from Afghanistan. While this may seem counterintuitive, this last initiative need not exclude the Kremlin. Indeed, NATO and the EU can also help strengthen some nations on Russia's periphery by projects that include the Kremlin. This would also demonstrate that NATO and EU policies are designed not just to discourage Kremlin aggression, but also to resuscitate cooperation on matters of mutual interest.

Policy in the grey zone should also focus on state weaknesses that Moscow exploits to ensure its control. As discussed above, the Kremlin uses its intelligence services to recruit agents in the power ministries of the post-Soviet states. It also uses its firms to acquire key sectors of these countries' economies and to buy political influence. With interested countries, the United States and NATO should offer programs to help vet the security services and militaries to make clear that they both are under the full control of the political leaders in these states. At the same time, the United States and the EU should expand programs to uncover corruption in the financial and other sectors of these countries' economies.

Conclusion

Two years after Russia began to tear Ukraine apart, and seven years after it did the same in Georgia, the West is finally waking up to the danger of Kremlin revanchism. The process has been slow, but it is moving in the right direction. It has been slow, partly because the White House has fixated on avoiding imprudent interventions and to this day has dismissed Kremlin aggression as a regional problem. It has also been slow because many in Western Europe are still unwilling to accept the unpleasant reality that there is a major security problem to their east. This is evident among those politicians calling for the EU to lift sanctions on Moscow.

Still, the West is getting close to where it needs to be to deter aggression against members of NATO. It does, however, need a clearer and firmer policy to strengthen the countries of the grey zone to Moscow's west and the EU's east. This is particularly true for Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, countries that would

like to develop democratic, open societies closely associated with the West.

Leaving them to the ministrations of the FSB is consistent with neither Western values nor interests. Nor is it consistent with the interests of the Russian people, who have need of a humane and prosperous society, not revisionism and tension with the West. The West can combine strong policies to deter Kremlin aggression with an open hand to further cooperation once Moscow decides that revisionism is a losing proposition. PRISM

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Some opponents of providing weapons argue that Kremlin military strength means that it can defeat any weapons system we provide. And if that happens, it would be geopolitical defeat for the United States. This is simply false. We can pursue a policy of weapons supply without taking responsibility for securing Moscow's defeat. We can provide weapons while making clear that we have no intention of using American troops. This was the successful rationale behind the Reagan Doctrine, which challenged Soviet overreach in Third World conflicts around the globe by providing weapons.

The last point is this. If we understand that Putin's aim of revising the post-Cold War order may mean aggression in countries beyond Ukraine, it is very much in our interest to make his experience in Ukraine as painful as possible. That will make him more vulnerable at home and will leave him with fewer resources for mischief elsewhere.

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