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Putin and the Nuclear Dimension to Russian Strategy

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ABSTRACT

Nuclear weapons and nuclear strategy have found themselves as parts of the discussions among expert and other commentators about the future of Russian President Vladimir Putin and about Russia's military-strategic options in Europe following its annexation of Crimea and destabilization of Eastern Ukraine. This study considers some of the nuclear-related aspects of Putin's and Russia's survivability with respect to: (1) principal challenges for NATO in the face of improving Russian military capabilities and plausible strategies, (2) the future relationship between Russia's conventional military and nuclear capabilities and military-strategic priorities, and (3) assessment of Russia's threat perceptions in the context of its 'strategic history'.

NATO challenges and options

Experts foresee little likelihood of a direct military clash between the United States and Russia or between Russia and NATO. One reason for this low probability of general war in Europe, even if Russian pressure is extended into other areas outside of NATO and formerly part of the Soviet Union, is the presence of nuclear weapons in Europe and offshore. Nuclear weapons provide a reminder that the risks of military escalation in East-Central Europe include the possibility of unforeseen costs unacceptable to either side.

Unless and until Putin's long-term path is clearer, the United States and NATO should remind Russian and other audiences that American nuclear weapons currently deployed in Europe are important symbols of commitment to European security and democratic peace. Nor, despite the accomplishments of the US-Russia New START agreement (2010), should the United States offer further reductions in long-range nuclear arsenals without a *quid pro quo* that includes a stable and democratic Ukraine freed from Russian intimidation and blackmail, let alone oblique threats of military invasion.

NATO member states on its northeastern and eastern peripheries will undoubtedly see an imminent threat to their own independence and expect greater commitments from the alliance. NATO agreed in February 2016 to

enhance its deterrent against Russian pressure on its Baltic and East European member states by increasing its ability to rapidly deploy ground, naval, and air forces. NATO defense ministers agreed to create a network of approaches, including rotating troops, alliance outposts, pre-stored equipment and war games, that would provide for rapid response without depending upon Cold War-sized military bases.¹ NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, anticipating a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov later in the same week at the Munich Security Conference, emphasized the defensive character of the alliance's strategy for the Baltics and Eastern Europe, noting that: 'We believe that especially when times are difficult, as they are now, it's even more important that we have political dialogue, channels open, between NATO and Russia'.²

Russia's military exercises, dividing into operational-strategic, joint exercises in support of others or its 'snap inspection' tests of combat readiness, reveal growing emphasis on preparing for offensive conventional operations; the warfare model seems to be mostly regional conventional conflict with attention to maintaining conflict escalation.³ Scenarios are crafted by the General Staff to include a large number of vignettes to help gain a clearer picture of how various force groupings could cope with disparate threats on each strategic axis. Naturally, this is most apparent in the major exercises that normally factor into their scenarios a number of differing conflict types to allow rehearsal of operations ranging from counter-terrorism through to conventional land warfare.⁴

The General Staff reportedly pays great attention to the formulation and use of scenarios in NATO exercises, while it has proved adept at speedily altering its own scenario planning for its major exercises.⁵ Consequently, Moscow seems to assess its own exercise scenarios as more accurately reflecting real-world possibilities while capable of making adjustments or sudden shifts to its scenario planning much more adroitly than NATO.⁶ The alliance needs to convince Moscow that its scenarios for the defense of the Baltic States are realistic, reflecting modern requirements and

¹R. Emmott and P. Stewart, 'NATO Agrees Russian Deterrent but Avoids Cold War Footing', *Reuters*, 10 February 2016, in *Johnson's Russia List 2016*, #30, davidjohnson@starpower.net.

²J. Stoltenberg, quoted in R. Emmott and P. Stewart, *Ibid*.

³See J. Norberg, *Training to Fight: Russia's Major Military Exercises 2011–2014*, FOI, Stockholm, November 2015, <http://foi.se/rapport?rNo=FOI-R-4128-SE>.

⁴See J. W. Kipp, 'The Zapad 2013 Strategic Exercise and the Function of Such Exercises in the Soviet Union and Russia', in L. Zdanavičius and M. Czekaj (eds.), *Russia's Zapad 2013 Military Exercise Lessons for Baltic Regional Security*, http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/Zapad_2013_-_Full_online_final.pdf, The Jamestown Foundation, Washington, DC, 2015.

⁵A. Bartosh, 'Otnosheniya Rossiya–NATO: shag vpered, dva shaga nazad', *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 12 February 2016, http://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2016-02-12/1_minoborony.html.

⁶J. W. Kipp, 'Eagle Guardian and the Strange Case of the Leak Without Legs (Part Two)', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 8(9) (2011), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=37353&cHash=e93d99406e#.VtwK7f96M8.

demonstrating deep understanding of Russian strategic realities and Russia's military culture.

A striking feature of Russia's military exercises in recent years is their focus on developing synergy between the various forces under the power ministries, rehearsing joint actions, using modern technologies including C4ISR with experimental use of automated command and control featuring heavily, combining civil society and the military in a near 'mobilized' format. The latter, of course, was a key factor in Zapad 2013, staged jointly with Belarus in a way that conveys Russian security thinking in the Western strategic direction. Zapad 2013 followed an established pattern by rehearsing offensive operations in the Western Military District and in Belarus and theaters close to the Baltic States. Above all, Northern Fleet submarine activity, timed to coincide with Zapad 2013 in conjunction with the nuclear forces exercise President Putin ordered in its aftermath, demonstrates that Moscow has not changed its nuclear policy, which includes first use as a 'demonstration strike' to induce an enemy power to negotiate — in other words, the operational use of tactical or other nuclear weapon types to 'de-escalate' a conflict.⁷

Similarly, Russia's strategic exercises, including Zapad 2013, confirm serious planning attention to improving strategic mobility. Forces and supplies are moved by rail, river, sea, and air and overland between the military districts, while also showing increasing interest in fostering civil ties to boost mobility. This featured prominently during Tsentr 2015 in September 2015, including rehearsal and active preparations for the air lines of communication (ALOCs) developed to support Russian operations in Syria that shortly ensued.⁸

The use of 'snap inspection' (*vnezapniye*) exercises makes more complex existing efforts to assess Russian military exercises, as the General Staff may evaluate these to form part of a larger exercise picture that allows them to move some elements around.⁹ When assessing Russia's military exercises in the vicinity of the Baltic States, it is now crucial to include careful reference to forces located throughout the Russian Federation, as the strategic mobility aspect shows movement of units from across the country; Russian military planners in this sense are widening their tool kit to expand operational planning options. These snap inspections equally form a central element in

⁷Protivoraketnaia sistema PRO uspeshno prrazilo uslovnnuiu tsel', imitiruiushchuiu ballisticheskuiu raketu', *Ekho Moskvy*, 30 October 2013, <http://echo.msk.ru/news/1188116-echo.html>; 'Voennye ucheniia raketnykh voisk i artillerii Leningradskaya oblast', 22 September 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KwaAUqllPc>; A. Tikhonov, 'Zapad-2013: Ot strategii k taktike', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 21 September 2013; A. Tikhonov, 'Zapad-2013: Vydizhenie voisk', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 9 September 2013.

⁸V. Mukhin and O. Vladykin, 'Armiya protestirovala v dele oboronnykh potentsial strany, *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 25 September 2015, http://nvo.ng.ru/forces/2015-09-25/1_glavnaya.html; 'Central Military District Engineers Build Open Field Airstrip For First Time in 30 Years, Russia's Defense Ministry, 26 August 2015; 'More Details on Major Logistics Drills: All-Sided Support for the Troops,' *Interfax*, 24 August 2015.

⁹A. Tikhonov, 'Where Threats to Peace Come From', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 27 May 2014, <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/16298-otkuda-iskhodyat-ugrozy-miru>; Y. Gavrilov, 'Games with Zero Outcome', *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 26 May 2014, <http://www.rg.ru/2014/05/23/konferenciya-site.html>.

the Kremlin's use of the armed forces to threaten or intimidate its neighbors, a motif that featured persistently in the Ukraine crisis with snap inspections of forces in the proximity of the Ukrainian border and in some cases not standing them down to include a veiled threat to Kyiv. Of particular concern for the alliance, and not only reflected in Russian military exercises, are continued endeavors to strengthen and develop A2/AD (anti-access, area denial) capabilities; this was rapidly bolted onto Russia's force support deployment in Syria following the Turkish Air Force downing the Su-24M in November 2015.¹⁰

These exercises taken as a whole show gradual enhancement of Russia's combat capabilities and readiness levels, indicating considerable interest in force groupings augmented by using other power ministry forces working in close partnership with civilian agencies. Such exercises are geared to testing innovative approaches to warfare, new or modernized systems, adjusting existing approaches to combat, coordinating with combat support, and markedly boosting the use and timeframes for combat service support. Russia's operations in Syria, rehearsed during Tsentr 2015, were smoothly facilitated by the reformed combat service support system Materiel-Technical Support (*Materialno-Tekhnicheskoye Obespecheniye* — MTO) in a manner few thought possible.¹¹ Utilizing all the logistical advantages offered by geographical proximity and rail infrastructure aided by MTO, the speed of deployment in a crisis situation in the Baltic Region would significantly narrow the window for NATO decision making.

Russia has taken steps to ensure that its armed forces are able to call upon A2/AD with more of such component systems being procured, featuring in exercises and, deployed in Crimea and in Latakia.¹² These systems give the Russian armed forces accurate standoff strike capabilities that present serious obstacles to NATO's ability to operate in various theaters, including the Baltic Region. The coastal defense system, 3K55 (SSC-5) Stoooge, in its mobile variety has been deployed to Crimea. The Russian defense industry is also working on developing a silo-based version, claiming that its locations could be concealed from enemy strikes.¹³

Moscow has also sought to consolidate its A2/AD capabilities by design and developing of a stealth platform for cruise missile launches: the SS-N-27 (3M-54 Klub) Sizzler, which is a container-based platform capable of covert

¹⁰'Russian Jets Will Defy NATO While Pounding Syria', *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief*, 17 February 2016.

¹¹A. Sharkovskiy, 'Moskva gotovitsya k dal'nemu zaplyvu', *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, 1 March 2016, http://www.ng.ru/armies/2016-03-01/2_msk.html; D. Bulgakov and O. Falichev, 'Dlya vypolneniya zadach v Sirii sozdany vse usloviya', *Voyenno Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 16 December 2015, <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/28486>.

¹²O. Vladykin, 'V armii. Strana narashchivayet boyevyye vozmozhnosti', *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, 22 March 2015, http://www.ng.ru/week/2015-03-22/11_army.html.

¹³'Russia Develops Stationary SSC-5 Stoooge Missile Systems with Silo-Based Launcher', *Defense World.Net*, 6 February 2016, http://www.defenseworld.net/news/15268/Russia_Develops_Stationary_SSC_5_Stoooge_Missile_Systems_With_Silo_Based_Launcher#.Vta0Sfi96M8.

launches from commercial container ships or from land using rail or road infrastructure. In addition, the SS-26 (9K720 Iskander) Stone, with a range of up to 500 km, has been used in exercises in Kaliningrad, with Moscow frequently threatening to permanently base these in the exclave in response to US-NATO ballistic missile defense (BMD). Finally, the SA-21 (S-400) Growler advanced air defense system is gradually replacing S-300P systems in service in air defense units.¹⁴ Moscow deployed the SA-21 to Latakia in response to the Turkish Air Force action against its aircraft violating Turkish airspace in November 2015. In this case, rather than simply relying on how the Russian military uses such systems during exercises, operational experience demonstrates that the SA-21 was a weapon of choice in building its air defense 'bubble' in Syria; this also included sending the 3K55 and supporting these with sophisticated electronic warfare systems.¹⁵

The presence of a range of such assets would undoubtedly complicate the Baltic Region as a potential theater of operations in a kinetic crisis. By positioning A2/AD systems within Russia, particularly Kaliningrad, in proximity to the Baltic States, Moscow has in effect created the same kind of 'bubble' seen in its operations in Syria. Consequently, these factors will demand equally nuanced planning on the part of NATO, complemented by robust advice for alliance political leaderships as to the potential implications of Russian A2/AD capabilities.

Moscow also pursues its most ambitious military modernization program in recent history, earmarking a total budget of around 19.3 trillion roubles to rearm its armed forces to the level of 70 percent new or modern by 2020. Its priorities are on modernizing the old stock of nuclear weapons to ensure the long-term future of Russian nuclear deterrence, introducing new hardware and weapons systems into the Aerospace Forces, the Navy, and Ground Forces units, in that order.¹⁶ Conventional modernization aims to displace former tank-centric approaches to warfare and to leverage improved C4ISR in order to act as a force multiplier and increase tactical and operational flexibility. While progress toward these targets is making headway, particularly in certain areas, the scale of ambition involved may yet face a reality check due to economic factors, including the impact of sanctions imposed by the G7 and the EU. This has a bearing on purchases of cutting-edge electronic technologies. Already, the defense budget has been cut by 5 percent in

¹⁴D. Barrie, 'Russia and Anti-Access/Area-Denial Capabilities', *Military Balance Blog*, 8 February 2016, <http://www.iiss.org/en/militarybalanceblog/blogsections/2016-629e/february-f0ed/russia-and-anti-access-area-denial-capabilities-9b3e>; L. Szaszdi, 'The Club-K: A Deadly Pandora's Box of Cruise Missiles', *Daily Signal*, 22 August 2011, <http://dailysignal.com/2011/08/22/the-club-k-a-deadly-%E2%80%9Cpandora%E2%80%99s-box%E2%80%9D-of-cruise-missiles/>.

¹⁵A. Khranchikhin, 'Ne pozhalet' by o peremirii', *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 4 March 2016, http://nvo.ng.ru/gpolit/2016-03-04/1_peace.html; O. Vladikin, 'S Rossiyei luchshe byt' v soyuze', *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 4 December 2015, http://nvo.ng.ru/wars/2015-12-04/1_union.html.

¹⁶S. Oxenstierna and F. Westerlund, 'Arms Procurement and the Russian Defense Industry: Challenges Up to 2020', *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 26(1) (2013), pp. 1–24.

2016, and this could become a pattern in years ahead, though officials say this will not have an impact on procurement.¹⁷

According to defense ministry figures, in 2015 six RS-24 Yars (SS-27) regiments went into service, and the share of modern weapons in the Strategic Rocket Forces (*Raketnye Voyska Strategicheskogo Naznacheniya* — RVSN) reached 51 percent; in support of the nuclear triad two Tu-160, three Tu-95MS, and five Tu-22M3 bombers were modernized, while SSBNs achieved 56 percent of modern weapons. In total, the Russian nuclear triad is 55 percent modern. The VKS (Russian Aerospace Forces) received 243 aircraft, 90 SAMs, and more than 200 radars, achieving a level of 52 percent modern. One significant advance for the various elements now included in the VKS is the marked increase in access to UAVs. Since 2011 this has grown steeply from operating around 180 to reaching 1,720. Naval modernization witnessed two submarines and eight surface ships entering service in 2015, and the level of modern equipment in the Navy stands at 39 percent. The Ground Forces formed eight new brigades in 2015, now burdened with the formation of three divisions in Western MD. More than 1,770 tanks were procured, 148 missile and artillery systems, 2,292 vehicles of different types, and two sets of SS-26 (Iskander-M) Stone. Ground Forces now have 35 percent modern arms and equipment, while this figure is higher in the VDV (41 percent), and the total in the armed forces is now 47 percent (exceeding the target of 30 percent by 2015).¹⁸

Russia's military modernization agenda has a number of valuable ramifications for the alliance and Baltic security. As a modernization program *per se* it is broad-based and intended to develop capabilities for a wide range of scenarios and operations that fit the picture emerging from military exercises and combat training.¹⁹ Russian views on future warfare, indeed the type of operations for which it appears to plan, are largely conducted under its nuclear umbrella, with the political-military leadership seeking to avoid worst-case scenarios owing to nuclear deterrence. Below this security umbrella and referencing Russia's recent experience of conflict, the focus is on higher-technology-based operations, integrating force groupings, and experimenting with the application of force in flexible and potentially innovative ways.²⁰

In response to internal political upheaval in a neighboring state, Russia is likely in the future to utilize soft power measures, including reflexive control,

¹⁷'Zamministra oborony na RSN rasskazala o raskhodakh vedomstva', *Rusnovosti*, 5 March 2016, <http://rusnovosti.ru/posts/411214>.

¹⁸'Rasshirennoye zasedaniye kollegii Ministerstva oborony', *Kremlin.ru*, 11 December 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50913>.

¹⁹D. Trenin, '2014: Russia's New Military Doctrine Tells It All', Carnegie Moscow Center, 29 December 2014, carnegie.ru/eurasiaoutlook/?fa=57607.

²⁰C. Vendil Pallin (ed.), *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective — 2011*, Swedish Defense Research Agency (FOI), Stockholm, 2012.

strategic deception, and disinformation, if it chooses to instigate instability. Opportunistic combination of hard and soft power can pay dividends. The modernization of the Ground Forces, for instance, still pays close attention to the role of the tank in combat operations, as well as seeking to introduce modern artillery or experiment with UAVs, though mainly for reconnaissance and fire extension purposes. Moscow remains highly motivated by introducing C4ISR combined with more concerted steps to implementing non-nuclear deterrence.²¹

The key theme uniting these disparate and often contradictory procurement priorities is the stress on boosting covert and rapid deployment of force, which has serious implications for NATO's ability to react to a conventional threat in the Baltic region made more complex by Russia's advances in A2/AD capabilities.²² However, perhaps more pressing for the alliance is the issue of Russian forces and soft power uniting to act against a member state in the 'gray zone' under the traditional threshold of Article V. These issues need to be confronted carefully by the alliance, as well as seeking to encourage different approaches to these challenges in the Baltic-Nordic security context.

Meanwhile, President Obama's a defense budget proposal for 2017 called for a fourfold increase in US military spending for Europe, and US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter explicitly stated that Russia now constituted a greater threat to US security than ISIS (and with the agreement of Director of National Intelligence James Clapper).²³ Russia's reaction to these and other moves by the United States and NATO appeared in the speech at the Munich Security Conference later in February 2016 by Russian Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev:

Speaking bluntly, we are rapidly rolling into a period of a new cold war. Russia has been presented as well-nigh the biggest threat to NATO, or to Europe, America and other countries (and Mr. Stoltenberg has just demonstrated that). They show frightening films about Russians starting a nuclear war. I am sometimes confused: is this 2016 or 1962?²⁴

The New START agreement does not preclude the United States from deploying future missile defenses, despite Russian efforts during the negotiating process to restrict American degrees of freedom in this respect. But then-Russian President Dmitri Medvedev and his predecessor-successor Vladimir Putin have made it clear that Russia's geostrategic perspective links US and

²¹N. De Larringa and N. Novichkov, 'Analysis: Russia's Armour Revolution', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 13 May 2015.

²²S. J. Freedberg, 'Russians Closed the Gap for A2/AD Air Force General Gorenc', *Breaking Defense*, 14 September 2015, <http://breakingdefense.com/2015/09/russians-closed-the-gap-for-a2ad-air-force-gen-gorenc/>.

²³See D. Rohrabacher, 'Why Is America Restarting the Cold War With Russia? Washington's Strategy Toward Moscow Is Outmoded and Misdirected', *The National Interest*, 11 February 2016, *Johnson's Russia List 2016*, #31, davidjohnson@starpower.net.

²⁴D. Medvedev, speech at the panel discussion, Munich Security Conference, Government.ru, 13 February 2016, *Johnson's Russia List 2016*, #32, davidjohnson@starpower.net.

NATO missile defenses to cooperation on other arms control issues. Meanwhile, the US and NATO in 2011 moved forward with the first phase of a four-phase deployment of the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) for missile defenses. In March 2013, US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel announced plans to modify the original plan for EPAA by abandoning the originally planned deployments of SM3 IIB interceptor missiles in Poland by 2022. However, this step failed to reassure Russian doubters about the US and NATO claims that their regional and global missile defenses were not oriented against Russia. Russian officials reiterated demands for a legally binding guarantee from the United States and NATO that Russian strategic nuclear forces would not be targeted by the system. Ironically Putin's irredentism in Ukraine may result in a NATO re-reboot of its missile defense plans and a decision for placement of missile defense components in Poland after all. In turn, Russia's response might be to fortify its Kaliningrad exclave with Iskander missiles, a high-precision tactical ballistic missile system very accurate for short distances and capable of being used with nuclear warheads.

Russia's conventional and nuclear Gordian knot and the Russian armed forces by 2025

Russia's 2010 Military Doctrine averred that the role of nuclear weapons is 'prevention of nuclear military conflict or any other military conflict' and that they are regarded as 'an important factor in the prevention of nuclear conflicts and military conflicts that use conventional assets (large-scale and regional wars)'.²⁵ The possibility that Russian nuclear weapons would be used in a conventional conflict for the purpose of de-escalation, by means of inflicting calibrated damage, first appeared in the 2000 Military Doctrine and is tacitly acknowledged as a possibility in the 2010 edition.²⁶ Calibrated damage is a proportional amount of damage that is subjectively unacceptable to the enemy and exceeds the benefits the aggressor expects to gain from the use of force. This possibility, of using tactical nukes for strategic de-escalation of a conventional war in progress and threatening to Russia's vital interests, is not repudiated in Russia's revised Military Doctrine signed by President Putin in December 2014 nor in Russia's updated National Security Strategy signed by Putin in December 2015.²⁷

²⁵The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation', text, 5 February 2010, www.Kremlin.ru, *Johnson's Russia List 2010*, #35, davidjohnson@starpower.net.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷J. Adamowski, 'Russia Overhauls Military Doctrine', *Defense News*, 10 January 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/policy/2015/01/10/russia-military-doctrine-ukraine-putin/21441759/>; A. Kureev, 'Russia's New National Security Strategy Has Implications for the West', 8 January 2016, <http://www.russia-direct.org/opinion/russias-new-national-security-strategy-has-implications-west>.

Whether non-strategic or 'tactical' nuclear weapons would be used for this mission is unclear: The role of non-strategic nuclear weapons in Russian military strategy is a subject of uncertainty.²⁸ Among the Russian armed forces, the navy is the principal advocate for maintaining non-strategic nuclear weapons capabilities, regarding them as essential for any conflict with the US Navy. Another possible use for theater or tactical nuclear weapons is presented by Russia's conventional military weakness relative to the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA). In addition to the greater size of PLA forces deployed into the Far Eastern theater of operations, there is also the possible inability of Russia's air force to guarantee air superiority against attacking Chinese units.²⁹ Although some Western experts regard Russian non-strategic nuclear weapons (as well as NATO's) as *passé* and militarily superfluous, Russian arms control expert Alexei Arbatov commented in 2010 that the 'colossal' US superiority in conventional weapons and the 'growing lag' in delivery vehicles for the (Russian) strategic nuclear forces meant that 'the role of TNW only grows as an instrument of foreign policy'.³⁰

Since the creation of the Russian armed forces in the aftermath of the Soviet dissolution, the force size has continuously declined. At a doctrinal level, there are still references to 'mobilization' potential, despite the fact that modern Russia has no realistic or timely mobilization potential and cannot plan in any meaningful way to deploy 'follow-on' forces inside several months at best.³¹ However, the most recent presidential decree on the total size of manpower set a target of reduction to 'one million'. In 2008, the nominal size of the armed forces was determined by presidential decree to 1,134,000; by 2010 the calculation was 1,116,224, and in 2011 this reached 1,056,197, with the target of 1,000,000 set for 2012 and 2013.³²

Despite numerous official statements, it was clear to foreign and Russian experts on the Russian armed forces that the total manpower size could not possibly be around 'one million', and most estimated that the real figure was closer to 750,000 or 800,000. During Roger McDermott's research in Moscow in October 2010, despite the official claims of 'one million' and Serdyukov's reform to 'permanent readiness' structures, sources close to the presidential administration disclosed that brigades away from border areas were only

²⁸A. Kokoshin, *Ensuring Strategic Stability in the Past and Present: Theoretical and Applied Questions*, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge, MA, June 2011.

²⁹R. N. McDermott, 'Russia's Conventional Armed Forces: Reform and Nuclear Posture to 2020', Ch. 2 in S. J. Blank (ed.), *Russian Nuclear Weapons: Past, Present and Future*, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 2011, pp. 33–97, esp. pp. 70–72. See also J. W. Kipp, 'Russia's Nuclear Posture and the Threat that Dare Not Speak Its Name', Ch. 10 in S. J. Blank (ed.), *Russian Nuclear Weapons: Past, Present and Future*, pp. 459–503.

³⁰A. Arbatov, cited in R. N. McDermott, 'Russia's Conventional Armed Forces: Reform and Nuclear Posture to 2020', p. 72.

³¹*Decree 146 of the RF President*, 5 February 2010, 'On the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation', *Sobraniye zakonodatel'stva Rossiyskoy Federatsiyi* [Legislation Collection of the Russian Federation].

³²Numbers of personnel and contract plans in 2012, see http://www.ng.ru/nvo/2011-12-28/1_dagestan.html; <http://www.kp.ru/daily/25793.3/2774933/>.

manned at around 70 percent strength (similar to Soviet category B divisional strength).³³ Under-manning in Russian units has long been known to be a key problem, despite persistent claims by political-military officials to the contrary, and probably varies in intensity depending upon specific unit and location. For instance, in February 2013 some of the units in Central MD had no more than 50 percent to 60 percent of the required conscripts.³⁴

In November 2012, the General Staff reported to newly appointed Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, stating that the armed forces were severely under-manned, ranging according to unit from 40 percent to 60 percent. In 2009, 576,500 persons were drafted into the armed forces, and only 295,700 were drafted in 2012; the 2009 figures reflect the transition from 18-month service to 12 months. General Staff data suggest that more than 166,000 persons either dodge service or avoid being delivered the draft papers. Even if somehow they manage to somehow deliver the draftees to the draft centers, the draft campaign cannot reach 2009 levels. ‘About 114,000 persons disappeared in the “demographic hole” that, according to the expert analyses in the next fifteen to twenty years will get even deeper (the demographic specialists portend that by 2030, our country will lose twenty percent of the working-age population)’, sources told *Izvestiya*. Equally, the plan to offset the reduction in conscript numbers by radically boosting the numbers of contract personnel to 425,000 by 2017 raised questions among some Duma Defense Committee members, who insist that the Finance Ministry did not allocate sufficient funds to finance this properly.³⁵

In Table 1 an outline is provided of the official, unofficial, and authors’ estimated figures for total manpower, broken down into officers, contract personnel, and conscripts. The unofficial figures stem from the Russian Audit Chamber, and its note released in October 2013, which offers the closest to any publicly available realistic assessment of the total numbers

Table 1. Official, unofficial, and estimate figures for Russian military manpower to 2020.

Official figures	Officers	Contract personnel	Conscripts	Total manpower
2013	220,000	186,000	594,000	1,000,000
	220,000	186,000	293,340	
2020	220,000	425,000	355,000	1,000,000
Unofficial figures	Officers	Contract personnel	Conscripts	Total manpower
2013	220,000	186,000	360,055	766,055
	220,000	186,000	293,340	699,340
Author estimates	Officers	Contract personnel	Conscripts	Total manpower
2020	220,000	346,000	195,560	761,560

³³ Author interviews, Russian presidential administration, October 2010.

³⁴ ‘Prosecutor Reveals Military Units in Central Russia Were Badly Understaffed in 2012’, *Interfax*, 28 February 2013.

³⁵ ‘A Headache’, *Izvestiya*, 27 November 2012.

under arms.³⁶ The authors' estimates are predicated on under-performance of contract manning aims and conscript recruitment by 2020.

In October 2013 an American blogger reported on *RIA Novosti* comments on the figures released by the Audit Chamber. This analysis presented the overall figure under arms as '766,055', with 220,000 officers, 186,000 contract personnel, and official draft figures from fall 2012 and spring 2013 at 153,200 and 140,140 and the remainder (66,715) as cadets in the military establishments.³⁷ However, even these figures present some difficulties, as noted in a report in *Vedomosti* in November 2013. The actual strength of the Russian armed forces, according to the Audit Chamber report on the audit of financial allowances in 2010–2012, suggests that manpower did not exceed 800,000 during the period. The Audit Chamber stated that based on monetary allowances' calculation, the numbers in 2010 were 769,596, and by 2011–2012, it reached 771,462.³⁸

Combat readiness is measured excluding the conscripts, boosting the readiness measurable component of the force structure (*kontraktniki*), which is partly explained by Moscow's threat assessment; for example, some Russian military analysts close to the defense ministry argue that Moscow must prepare for worst-case scenarios in Central Asia. The overall effort is geared to rebalance the contract/conscript mix serving in the armed forces to improve combat readiness. Yet it seems from the reduction of the draft targets that Moscow is experimenting with 'less is more', and the underlying driver is about raising standards as a basis from which to select higher-quality contract personnel.³⁹

Faced with these recruitment issues and challenges, Moscow has begun experiments with a new form of recruitment center aimed at recruiting directly from the population rather than solely relying on the conscript pool. Such recruitment centers were opened in the MDs' military districts and fleets in August 2012. These are new structures in the armed forces modeled on the type of centers existing in NATO countries, particularly the United States. They were formed on the basis of existing military commissariats. The distinction, however, is that unlike the latter where all posts are now civilian, the TO makes provision for two officer posts (a colonel and a major), three contract soldiers, and approximately five civilian personnel.⁴⁰ The recruitment centers disseminate advertising to popularize military

³⁶'Shoigu's First Draft: Who Goes into the Army, Who Goes Home', *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 2 April 2013.

³⁷The second line in the unofficial figures gives total manpower minus the cadets.

³⁸'General Staff Says There Are Quarter Million Draft Dodgers; Many Unfit Because of Health', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 13 March 2013.

³⁹Author interviews with retired Russian officers, defense journalists, and individuals close to the presidential administration.

⁴⁰'Interview with Head of the Chief Personnel Management Directorate Lieutenant-General Viktor Goremykin', *Eko Moskv*, 9 August 2013; 'Recruitment to the Rescue: The Defense Ministry Intends to Make the Russian Army One-Fourth Professional by the End of the Year', *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 31 July 2012.

service by contract in the regions. They also cooperate with employment exchanges and other centers such as the Federal Migration Center and higher educational establishments.⁴¹

It is probable that for some time to come the Russian political-military leadership will adhere, however much unrealistically, to the notional figure of 'one million' and refuse to recalibrate the total.⁴² However, given the demographic and financial pressures involved, it is also likely that one of the following three options will be pursued in the long term:

- Abandon the one million total and reset to 800,000 or 750,000 with capital reinvestment in housing and social conditions for contract personnel;
- Allow a period of drift until the contract/conscript ratio settles and then recalculate the total needed;
- Set an official high-end figure and also work on the basis of an unofficial, more realistic assessment of manning levels.⁴³

It is likely, though by no means certain, given the downward sizing pattern of the Russian armed forces since 1992, and the extreme difficulty in meeting the one million figure with the term of service fixed at 12 months, that by 2020 the total manning figure will be closer to 700,000.⁴⁴ Any assessment of the specific service areas or posts that will be prioritized in the process of enhancing *kontraktniki* numbers in the Russian armed forces must appreciate how the defense ministry and General Staff perceive the measurement of combat readiness. Russian military specialists in this field refer to 'posts that determine combat readiness', and it is evident that *conscripts are excluded* from this measurement.⁴⁵

Rooted in this Russian measurement of combat readiness, it is possible to define more clearly the priority areas according to service and posts that will be the priority area to 2017 and beyond. According to CGS Army-General Valeriy Gerasimov, by 2020 there should be no conscripts used in a combat line unit (*lineynaya voynskaya chast*) during military operations. Meanwhile,

⁴¹Colonel A. Mosolov, who headed a Moscow Oblast city commissariat in 2009–10 the recruitment of contract soldiers, was handled by the Generals Staff and the organization and mobilization structures in military districts and fleets under its jurisdiction. Serdyukov entrusted the recruitment of contract personnel to the Main Personnel Directorate, where a special directorate was created. 'The explanation for this was that the Main Personnel Directorate is a specialized structure that had been selecting candidates for military service as officers and warrant officers at a professional level on a more effective and competent basis', Mosolov explains. Now the Main Personnel Directorate, through the new recruitment centers, will also have to recruit candidates for contract personnel posts (V. Goremykin, *Ibid.*).

⁴²'Army's Image Improves in Russia', *Vestnik Kavkasa*, 6 August 2013.

⁴³Author interviews with retired Russian officers, defense journalists, and individuals close to the presidential administration.

⁴⁴See http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=11800712@egNews; http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=11794245@egNews, July 2013.

⁴⁵See http://www.ng.ru/editorial/2012-12-04/2_red.html.

the measurement of combat readiness is unlikely to be standardized across the military, as it will be difficult for the General Staff to compare assessments of units fully staffed by contract personnel with those containing various mixes of contract/conscript ratios.⁴⁶ These manpower issues, including difficulties in recruitment and retention of highly trained contract personnel, coupled with enduring problems in developing the NCO cadre, combined with the challenges of military modernization with its glacial adoption of C4ISR capability, will serve to limit Russian conventional military capability over the next decade and beyond, with significant implications for nuclear policy.

Russia also considers its non-strategic nuclear weapons as a counterbalance to the nuclear forces of states other than the United States and NATO, especially for those states whose nuclear capabilities are able to reach Russian territory. One prospective use for Russian tactical nukes might be to take out enemy precision-strike and C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) capabilities, thereby leveling the playing field of advanced conventional warfare otherwise tilted against Russia. For this and other reasons, NATO remains sensitive to the possible modernization of Russia's non-strategic missile forces. US reports to NATO in January 2014 claimed that Russia had tested a new medium-range ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM), a possible violation of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty signed by Presidents Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987.⁴⁷

Russia's nuclear strategy, based on 'defensive deterrence', provides a security umbrella under which the state seeks to conduct operations while reminding other powers of its nuclear capabilities. On the basis of what Moscow puts into the public domain in its published security documents, its military modernization, and exercises as well as statements by the political-military leadership, there are reasons to be cautious about Russian nuclear policy. In 2000 Russia's military doctrine gave credence to the possible use of nuclear weapons in a conventional conflict as a means of inflicting calibrated damage as a means to de-escalate conflict. Since then, this has proved to be a frequent feature of large-scale strategic exercises, including nuclear exercises, and is indeed tacitly acknowledged in the 2014 Military Doctrine: 'Nuclear weapons will remain an important factor in preventing the outbreak of nuclear military conflicts and conventional military conflicts (large-scale war, regional war)'.⁴⁸

⁴⁶'Russian Army Chief Confirms Conscripts Won't Be Used in Combat', *Interfax*, 14 February 2013.

⁴⁷M. R. Gordon, 'US Says Russia Tested Missile, Despite Treaty', *New York Times*, 29 January 2014. The Treaty bans deployment of nuclear or conventional ground based missiles by NATO or the former Soviet Union (and now Russia) with ranges from 500 to 5,500 kilometers.

⁴⁸The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2014, 26 December 2014, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf>.

Perhaps the only major achievement of the Obama administration's failed 'reset' policy with Russia was signing the New START Treaty, but no progress was made on addressing the issue of reducing or removing sub-strategic nuclear weapons (SSNW) or tactical nuclear weapons from Europe.⁴⁹ Russian arms control expert Alexei Arbatov argues that the 'colossal' US superiority in conventional weapons and lag in delivery vehicles for RVSN means 'the role of TNW only grows as an instrument of foreign policy'.⁵⁰ Other Russian specialists argue that the role of SSNW in Russia's nuclear strategy is a matter of uncertainty.⁵¹ However, Russia has staged high-profile exercises that have included a simulated nuclear attack on Poland (Zapad 1999) and more recently on Sweden in March 2013. Moscow appears to attach an operational value to SSNW and uses them to compensate for conventional weaknesses or more systemic weakness in differing strategic directions, either toward NATO in the West or China in the East.⁵²

Agreement on reducing SSNW is a distant prospect. For the Kremlin this issue is made more complex due to opposing BMD and Prompt Global Strike plans. One possible operational function assigned to Russian SSNW might be to target enemy precision-strike and C4ISR systems, asymmetrically changing the balance in a conflict and effectively nullifying NATO's technological superiority.⁵³ Reportedly, in January 2014 Russia tested a new medium-range ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM), a possible violation of the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty.⁵⁴

Many of these oblique threats are combined or form the backdrop to bombastic or even threatening remarks by Russia's political-military leadership. For instance, Colonel-General Vladimir Chirkin, the former Commander of the Ground Forces, earlier referred to SSNW in March 2010, noting the imbalance in forces in Russia's Far East and China's PLA armies on the other side of the border. He said Russia wants 'friendly relations' with strong nations, including China, but understands that to

⁴⁹The Russian defense ministry definition of these weapons in *Voyennyy Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar'* makes clear that there is an operational role for these systems: 'This type of nuclear weapon includes operational-tactical and tactical weapons of respective configuration and equipment: ground-based missile systems, cannon artillery, aerial bombs, ship-borne missile systems, torpedoes, anti-missile systems, controlled and naval mines'. *Voyennyy Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar*, Ministry of Defence, Moscow, 2007, p. 882.

⁵⁰R. N. McDermott, 'Russia's Conventional Armed Forces: Reform and Nuclear Posture to 2020', Ch. 2 (pp. 70–72) and J. W. Kipp, 'Russia's Nuclear Posture and the Threat that Dare Not Speak its Name', Ch. 10 (pp. 459–503), both in S. J. Blank (ed.), *Russian Nuclear Weapons: Past, Present and Future*, op. cit.

⁵¹N. Sokov, 'The New, 2010 Russian Military Doctrine: The Nuclear Angle', *Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies*, 5 February 2010, http://cns.miis.edu/stories/100205_russian_nuclear_doctrine.htm.

⁵²See A. Kokoshin, 2011, op. cit.

⁵³See D. Goure, 'Moscow's Visions of Future War: So Many Conflict Scenarios So Little Time, Money and Forces', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 27(1) (2014), pp. 63–100; and J. W. Kipp, 'Smart' Defense from New Threats: Future War from a Russian Perspective: Back to the Future after the War on Terror', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27 (1) (2014), pp. 36–62; S. J. Blank, *Arms Control and Proliferation Challenges to the Reset Policy*, U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, PA, 2011.

⁵⁴M. R. Gordon, 'US Says Russia Tested Missile, Despite Treaty', *The New York Times*, 29 January 2014.

‘quiet a friend down’, it is necessary to possess ‘a conventional or nuclear club’.⁵⁵

However, such expressions of defiance are more frequently aimed toward the United States and NATO, with the leadership connecting nuclear modernization plans to the need to ‘overcome’ NATO BMD. Moreover, in March 2015, during a televised documentary on *Rossiya 1* to celebrate the first anniversary of the annexation of Crimea, President Putin specifically referred to placing nuclear forces on alert during the operations in February–March 2014 in a clear signal that the Kremlin is convinced that possession of nuclear weapons offers a means to deter other actors from interfering even in an action that blatantly flouts international law.⁵⁶

One school of thought holds that, had the United States not conveyed an image of weakness over the past five years, Russia may not have so brazenly risked a larger conflict in order to annex Crimea. Another school regards Russian behavior as driven by Putin’s fears of losing power at home due to rising protest and economic stagnation, offset by Crimea and other demonstrations of nationalism and cries for ‘New Russia’ outside its current borders. Regardless of the causes, the United States and NATO have choices about how to respond.

Russia and strategic history

Earlier discussion begs the question whether Russia’s annexation of Crimea is part of a larger program of strategy and policy on the part of Putin and his advisors or, to the contrary, a somewhat improvised and hasty reaction to events in Ukraine and their implications. Perhaps there is some truth in both interpretations. Putin’s actions in Crimea were not entirely *sui generis*: They were preceded by a context of demands upon Russia from its post-Cold War military and geostrategic setting, compared to that of the Soviet Union. Putin’s policy is not the result of psychodrama. It is the product of his having lived in strategic history and his (and our) understanding of that history. Neither in Russian nor in English is strategic history self-interpreting. Heads of state and military commanders make strategic history as they go, doing their best to tie together the ends, ways, and means of politico-military action.⁵⁷

The Barack Obama administration sought to reset relations with Russia during that US President’s first term in office, leading to the accomplishment of the New START agreement on strategic nuclear arms reductions in 2010 (taking effect in February 2011). However, subsequent US-Russian and

⁵⁵Chirkin made these comments prior to his appointment as the commander of the ground forces, a post from which he was later sacked due to allegations of corruptions. ‘Russia Strengthens the Border with China’, *Argumenty Nedeli*, 4–10 March 2010.

⁵⁶Krym: Pu’ Na Rodinu [Crimea: the Way Back Home], 8 March 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTRNiy39e5E>.

⁵⁷On the concept of strategic history, see C. S. Gray, *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History*, 2nd ed., Routledge, New York, 2012.

NATO-Russian disputes over the Obama plan for deploying missile defenses in Europe created obstacles to further progress on nuclear arms limitation, on nonproliferation, and on a revived Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) more acceptable to Russia than the defunct Cold War original version.⁵⁸

Improved economic performance is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for a Russian army that can cope with third-wave, postindustrial warfare. Smart soldiers and innovative commanders who can think 'out of the box' are as important as technology as the nature of warfare shifts from massive battles of attrition to flexible and small-scale military operations. In addition, future warfare will take place in at least five dimensions: land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace.⁵⁹ These multiple environments for future war-fighting make the challenges posed by the 'initial period of war' especially problematical for technically backward militaries.⁶⁰ The possibility of decisive losses within minutes or seconds in the 'initial period' of war, including a possible cyberwar that would create chaos with exclusively electronic casualties, is now within the reach of feasible or foreseeable military art.⁶¹ Russia's historical exposure to attack and invasion, including the defeats imposed on the Soviet Union during the early stages of Hitler's *Operation Barbarossa* in 1941, remains in the DNA of today's and tomorrow's Russian political leaders and commanders.⁶²

Russia's national security concepts in 2010 and 2015 and its related military doctrine show its fears of surprise attack in the face of NATO conventional military superiority.⁶³ A 'Barbarossa complex' is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for present-day Russia to avoid wars or to prevail in war if necessary. However, Russian military planners might reasonably assume that the initial period of war can be one of great danger. What

⁵⁸For pertinent perspective and background, see S. J. Blank, *Arms Control and Proliferation Challenges to the Reset Policy*, U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, PA, 2011.

⁵⁹For perspective on Russia's challenges with respect to information and cyber wars, see T. Thomas, 'Russia's Information Warfare Strategy: Can the Nation Cope in Future Conflicts?', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 27(1) (2014), pp. 101–130. See also: T. Thomas, *Recasting the Red Star: Russia Forges Tradition and Technology through Toughness*, Foreign Military Studies Office, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, 2011.

⁶⁰For recent expert commentary on Russian views of future war, see D. Goure, 'Moscow's Visions of Future War', op. cit., and J. W. Kipp, 'Smart Defense From New Threats', op. cit.

⁶¹Russian and Soviet literature on this subject are extensive. See, for example, S. P. Ivanov, *Nachal'nyy period voyny: po opytu pervykh kampaniy i operatsiy vtoroy mirovoy voyny* [The Initial Period of War: On the Experience of the First Campaigns of the Second World War], Voenizdat, Moscow, 1974. For an appraisal of Soviet threat assessment between the two world wars, see J. Erickson, 'Threat Identification and Strategic Appraisal by the Soviet Union, 1930–41', Ch. 13 in E. R. May (ed.), *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1984, pp. 375–424.

⁶²For overviews of this issue, see D. M. Glantz, 'The Red Army in 1941', pp. 1–37, and J. Kipp, 'Soviet War Planning', pp. 40–54 in D. M. Glantz (ed.), *The Initial Period of War on the Eastern Front, 22 June–August 1941*, Frank Cass, London, 1993; R. H. Phillips, *Soviet Military Debate on the Initial Period of War: Characteristics and Implications*, Center for International Studies, MIT, Cambridge, MA, 1989, and J. W. Kipp, *Barbarossa, Soviet Covering Forces and the Initial Period of War: Military History and Airland Battle*, Soviet Army Studies Office, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, undated.

⁶³Text, 'The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation', 5 February 2010, www.Kremlin.ru, in *Johnson's Russia List 2010*, #35, davidjohnson@starpower.net. See also N. Sokov, 'The New, 2010 Russian Military Doctrine: The Nuclear Angle', Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, 5 February 2010, http://cns.miis.edu/stories/100205_russian_nuclear_doctrine.htm.

seemed politically absurd in a temporary surge of US-Russian ‘reset’ and post-post-Cold War Europe was not necessarily impossible from the standpoint of Russian military pessimists. From the perspective of risk-averse Russian military planners, Russian forces drawn back to the western border districts of the current Federation will be in very much the same position as those who faced the onslaught of *Barbarossa* in 1941. Russian intelligence will place equally high importance on the detection of enemy political decision to attack (strategic warning) as on the acquisition of order-of-battle data and other information essential for response to tactical warning.

In addition, the United States and Russia have an objective community of interest in lowering the nuclear threshold by improving the quality of Russia’s conventional forces (to a point) relative to its nuclear ones, so that Russia’s nuclear employment policies and declaratory doctrines are less forward-leaning with respect to nuclear first or early use in a conventional war. More specifically, Russia must be disabused of the notion that a nuclear first use in Europe or elsewhere would be an effective means of ‘de-escalation’ of an otherwise conventional conflict on terms favorable to Russia. Escalators run in two directions.

Indeed, a more favorable climate for US-Russian and NATO-Russian cooperation on nuclear arms limitation should also contribute to more realistic threat assessments in Moscow with respect to the prevention or conduct of conventional warfare. Russia is not threatened primarily by NATO — unless Putin loses control of his limited-risk forward strategy in Ukraine and creates a self-negating feedback loop.⁶⁴ Instead, the threat of regional wars on Russia’s periphery or terrorism and insurgent wars within Russia must now take pride of place in General Staff and Ministry of Defense contingency planning. Preparedness for these contingencies of limited and local wars, regular and irregular, will require a smaller, more professional and more mobile military than post-Soviet Russia has fielded hitherto.⁶⁵ As well, Russia’s armed forces, together with the General Staff and Ministry of

⁶⁴Tendencies toward escalation of Russian threat perceptions with regard to NATO and in defiance of reality are noted in S. J. Blank, ‘Lt. Kizhe Rides Again: Magical Realism and Russian National Security Perspectives’, *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 27(2) (2014), pp. 310–357.

⁶⁵On the subject of accomplishments and disappointments in Russian military reform, see R. N. McDermott, ‘The Brain of the Russian Army: Futuristic Visions Tethered by the Past’, *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 27(1) (2014), pp. 4–35; A. Golts, ‘Reform: The End of the First Phase — Will There Be a Second?’, *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 27(1) (2014), pp. 131–146; and Keir Giles, ‘A New Phase in Russian Military Transformation’, *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 27(1) (2014), pp. 147–162. For additional perspective, see D. R. Herspring, ‘Russian Nuclear and Conventional Weapons: The Broken Relationship’, Ch. 1, pp. 1–31, and R. N. McDermott, ‘Russia’s Conventional Armed Forces: Reform and Nuclear Posture to 2020, Ch. 2, pp. 33–97, both in S. R. Blank (ed.), *Russian Nuclear Weapons: Past, Present and Future*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 2011. See also A. Cohen and R. E. Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 2011; R. Thornton, *Military Modernization and the Russian Ground Forces*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 2011; R. McDermott, *The Reform of Russia’s Conventional Armed Forces: Problems, Challenges, and Policy Implications*, The Jamestown Foundation, Washington, DC, 2011; and P. Baev, ‘Neither Reform nor Modernization: The Armed Forces under and after Putin’s Command’, Ch. 5 in M. Galeotti (ed.), *The Politics of Security in Modern Russia*, Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey, UK, 2010, pp. 69–88.

Defense, must be made accountable to its political leadership as an institutional, not a personal, matter. Unless these political and military building blocks are put into place, Russia's armed forces and military doctrine will be maladapted for the security challenges of the 21st century.

Conclusions

Short of nuclear first use, or even explicit nuclear threats, Russia does possess strategic capabilities for *fait accompli* operations on its periphery and can assert a scenario-dependent case for favorable outcomes supported by escalation dominance. These capabilities might therefore deprive NATO of a proportionate 'response in kind' under some conditions, leaving the alliance with little effective deterrence capability in theater. Any substantial pre-emptive deployment in theater by NATO forces would likely result in escalation, with the alliance lacking control over that escalation. Consequently, in such a hypothetical scenario, Moscow could even pre-empt NATO's deployment, leaving the alliance facing the decision as to whether to back down or effectively go to war with Russia.

As Jānis Bērziņš of the National Defence Academy of Latvia has noted, Russia's Crimean campaign (and subsequent disruption of eastern and southern Ukraine) was achieved by the operationalization of what Russian military thinkers refer to as 'New Generation Warfare' that includes a coordinated campaign of strategic communications using political, psychological, and information strategies.⁶⁶ Bērziņš's assessment, that Russia regards the mind as a key part of the battle space of future warfare, applies not only to the threat or use of conventional forces by Russia and/or possible opponents. The point also applies to the existence of nuclear deterrence and to the implicit threat of nuclear first use created by the very existence of nuclear weapons in Russia and NATO and by their forward deployments in positions that make it impossible for either Russia or NATO to exclude them from a widening conventional war.

Therefore NATO and Russia, even into the post-Cold War world and the 21st century, have maintained a nuclear umbrella over conventional deterrence that creates a deterrence system that is both potentially stabilizing, if leaders are risk averse, and potentially destabilizing, if risk-acceptant leaders lose control over a process of escalation. Nuclear weapons connect the start of a small conventional war in Europe into a possibly greater chain of escalation, the threat of which is supposed to deter because it is *not* entirely predictable or manageable. In addition, nuclear weapons make the possibility

⁶⁶J. Bērziņš, *Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense Policy*, Policy Paper No. 2, National Defence Academy of Latvia, Center for Security and Strategic Research, April 2014.

of Russia's defeat in a conventional war very dangerous to Russia's adversaries as well as to Russians.

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