

The Estonian Town of Narva

On the Western Side of an Eastern River

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Joseph Burns

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Abstract

Moscow's support for loosely defined Russian compatriots throughout the world has been used as pretext for hybrid warfare campaigns in Georgia and Ukraine. These interventions supported Russia's broader strategic interest in stopping NATO expansion. Positioned on the Russian frontier, the Baltic state of Estonia has a history of animus with Russia and lacks a ratified border treaty. Disaffected Russian compatriots in Estonia, particularly in the border town of Narva, offer Moscow the opportunity to weaken NATO if Russia can cleave Narva from Estonia without provoking a military response from its NATO allies. Seeking to avoid the choice between war and abandoning Article 5, Western leaders have pursued an array of regulatory, infrastructure, rhetorical, political, and military measures to shore up security in the Baltics. However, these efforts to avoid the dilemma are not an adequate substitute for the political resolve to face down Russian revanchist efforts, militarily if necessary.

"The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area."

NATO Article 5: Common Defense¹

Introduction

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have made a concerted effort to reorient their political, economic, and security postures to the West. Initially, with the nascent Russian Federation struggling to emerge from its Soviet ruins, this orientation seemed obvious and uncomplicated for small nations freed from their communist occupiers. The 2004 accession to the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was hoped to cement the Baltic states permanently into the Western order. However, fueled by a boom in hydrocarbon prices and driven by the revanchist desires of Vladimir Putin, the Russian Federation has reemerged on the world stage. Motivated by historical grievance, a strategic need to balance against NATO intrusions into Russia's historic sphere of privileged influence, and a compatriot-based protection doctrine rooted in notions of Russian cultural supremacy, Russia has systematically and aggressively sought to claw back the territory it surrendered in the early 1990s.

Against this rising Russian imperial tide, the Baltic states now find themselves on the frontier between a faltering Western liberal order and a resurgent Russia emboldened by a series of geopolitical conquests in Moldova, Georgia, Crimea, Syria, and Ukraine. The Estonian town of Narva, a tiny outpost on the edge of the Western world and home to a predominantly ethnic Russian population, seems particularly vulnerable to Russian opportunism. Estonia has a history of grievance with Russia that is both legal and personal, lacks a ratified border treaty with the Russian Federation, and has failed to effectively integrate the ethnic Russians that remained after the Soviet collapse into Estonian culture

¹ (NATO, 1949)

and civil society. Situated on the western bank of an eastern river, the residents of Narva may live in Estonia, but their culture is decidedly Russian. While EU and NATO membership are a significant hedge against Russian aggression, there is an open question in Western capitals about how much the rest of the West is willing to risk for the sake of Estonia. Even more in doubt is what the West would risk to retain a small hamlet of ethnic Russians like Narva.

Hoping to avoid such a dilemma, Western leaders have sought to solidify Estonia and its Baltic brethren in the liberal firmament via a series of mutually reinforcing political, regulatory, and economic initiatives through the European Union. Wary of heavy dependence on Russian hydrocarbon imports and source isolation inherited from Soviet central planning, the West has supported the Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan (BEMIP), which links the Nordic, Baltic, and European energy infrastructure systems. Once completed, this wedding of Western energy, coupled with the advent of the American shale boom and EU regulatory initiatives, will militate against the monopolistic advantages of Russian energy companies and greatly limit Russia's ability to selectively manipulate energy supplies in order to extract political concessions from specific EU member states. Additionally, despite rumors about the obsolescence of NATO, Western nations have deployed forces to the Baltic states to provide a trip wire and raise the stakes of any Russian aggression. This premise rests solely on broad Western support for NATO's mutual self-defense pact that is articulated in Article 5 of the Washington treaty; a Russian assault on any Baltic territory causes the entire West to rally for war. Laudable as these efforts may be, they seek to avoid the question of Western will in the face of Russian revanchist ambitions; they do not answer it.

This paper will contextualize Russia's Baltic ambitions amid their broader geopolitical purposes, outline the checkered past of bilateral relations between Tallinn and Moscow, analyze previous Russian interventions to draw out implications for Estonia, address competing assessments of the risk of Russian aggression, and explain why NATO is more likely to face their obligations laid out in Article 5 to defend a place like Narva, not Tallinn or Brussels. Estonia's future, and indeed the future of NATO, the EU, and the Western liberal order they represent hinge not on the efficacy of specific troop deployments or technocratic regulatory regimes, but on the ability to generate the will to stare down the rising Russian tyrant.

From Theory to Practice in the Baltics

The Cold War rivalry between the communist East led by Moscow and the liberal West led by Washington was dominated by the realist approach to world politics. While the Soviets based their society on Marxist historical materialism that serves as the basis for critical theory, the West sought to lock in post war gains by creating liberal institutions and advocating for constitutional republics built on market economies, individual liberties, and property rights. However, despite competing ideologies, realist thinking prevailed with decision makers on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The fall of the Soviet

Union offered the possibility for the “end of history,”² with the hope that liberal institutionalism, underwritten by a benevolent American hegemony, could transcend the world of naked power politics to achieve a world of cooperative engagement through institutions (Wohlforth, 1999).

Unfortunately, that has not been the case. Great power competition remains entrenched. Faithful adherents to realism, especially the structural realism advanced by Kenneth Waltz, see the resumed rivalry between Moscow and Washington as the natural outcome of a world lacking centralized authority. Just as in the Cold War, the United States and Russia compete politically, economically, and military to ensure their own security. Differences in ideology fade in importance as states seek to erase relative deficiencies and maximize relative advantage. In this arena dominated by great powers, capable states balance while smaller states that lack the capacity to compete effectively, such as the Baltic states, are forced to bandwagon, trading loyalty in the hope of security (Waltz, 1979).

Accordingly, increased tensions between East and West are the logical outgrowth of the eastward expansion of Western political and security structures such as the EU and NATO since the Soviet collapse. These institutions threaten Russian security, and in an anarchic world, aggressive Russian reactions are a natural balancing response to Western institutional expansion. While Western leaders may insist this expansion poses no threat to the sovereignty of the Russian state, Moscow cannot rely on Western assurances to satisfy Russian security interests. Rather, given the untenable challenge to adequately defend Russia’s vast land borders, geography incentivizes the Kremlin to maximize its security by maintaining a buffer between its own frontiers and the West (Snyder, 2002). Accordingly, Russian aggression in its self-described “near abroad” is predicted by realpolitik dictums of power balancing and security maximization.

However, liberal institutionalists reject the notion that NATO and EU expansion into central and eastern Europe was simply a vehicle for Western power politics, but rather represented the hope of creating a common security and political framework to avoid new war. By incorporating newly independent states into a common economic market, providing political representation in Brussels, and including them within a collective security framework, the West sought to intervene in the traditional pattern of interstate competitions. On the more idealist end of the spectrum, some Western reformers speculated on the possibility of incorporating Russia into these frameworks. Skeptics of the institutional approach rejected the possibility that institutions would intervene in patterns of interstate competition, and instead considered NATO a vehicle for increasing American power while the EU offered Germany the political and economic vehicle to balance against both Russia and the United States.

While these critiques may well be true, these institutions have also delivered on some of their claims. NATO does provide a common security framework on a continent previously riddled with warring states. Through NATO, the number of American military personnel on the continent of Europe has decreased, undercutting the notion that the fall of the Soviet Union precipitated an aggressive

² Francis Fukuyama’s conception of the “End of History” has received a broad range of critique as ahistorical and naïve, with critics often pointing to familiar historical patterns recurring in recent years. However, Fukuyama’s argument was based on his observation that the liberal democratic form of government was gathering widespread support throughout the world and that could constitute the dominant, and controversially, final form of government (Fukuyama, 1992, pp. xi-xxiii). The use of his famous phrase is not intended to lampoon his argument, but rather articulate the possibility that liberal institutionalism provided an alternative and escape from power politics.

American military overreach. Despite its ever more apparent flaws, the EU has largely succeeded in providing a common economic market, coordinating fiscal and regulatory policy, creating a common venue for politics, and made possible the notion of an identity tied to the institutions of Europe as opposed to the nationalities of its member states. The problem with the institutional approach is not that they cannot be effective in facilitating interstate cooperation, but rather, that such cooperation cannot be achieved unless all parties are members of effective institutions (Ehin & Berg, 2009, pp. 6-7).

Unfortunately, the preeminent Western institutions are not well suited for Russian membership. Moscow fundamentally distrusts NATO so the concept of a common security architecture for Russia under the umbrella of NATO membership has never been a viable possibility. While NATO may have stumbled to find institutional purpose after the Soviet collapse and sought to include Russia by inviting them to attend forums like the NATO Parliamentary Assembly or incorporation in the NATO Partnership for Peace program, the rise of Putin's regime and the specter of Russian revisionism has returned NATO to its original purpose. The political, economic, and electoral reforms required by the EU do not square well with the Russian concept of "sovereign democracy", which is to say absolute sovereignty without genuine democracy. The economic and fiscal incentives of access to the European market and a strong central currency do not appeal for Russia, as European demand for Russian energy guarantees them access to the European market without the need to assent to EU political or regulatory reforms. Additionally, the institutions that Russia and West do share in common, most notably the United Nations (UN), lack effective enforcement mechanisms and serve more as a forum to facilitate symbolic diplomatic coups against one another (Ehin & Berg, 2009, p. 7). While better than open war, such a peace can hardly be heralded as a great success of the institutional approach.

While the institutional approach has largely failed to incorporate Russia into a cooperative framework to overcome the harsh zero-sum nature of Cold War politics, the accession of the Baltic states into Western institutions in 2004 offered an opportunity for old grievances to be abandoned. Baltic leaders hoped that membership in the large, powerful, and prestigious institutions of Europe would cause Russia to treat them as equals worthy of respect, rather than vassals in their "near abroad". Russians hoped that Baltic membership in the EU and NATO, while unfortunate, could finally help the Baltic states to overcome their irrational paranoia about their territorial security (Ehin & Berg, 2009, pp. 3-4). Additionally, EU membership imposed responsibilities upon the Baltic states to pursue legal reforms that ensured greater rights for their Russian minorities living in the Baltics. However hopeful some might have been in 2004, recent history has cast aside the prospect of normalized relations.

The historical animus the increasing tensions between the Russia and the West is often cast either as a return to an inescapable realpolitik that characterized the Cold War or a struggle between the liberal West and the authoritarian East. However, the failure to reset Russo-Baltic relations on more amicable terms indicates the inadequacy of strictly realist or liberal explanations. Realists in Russia would be unmoved by domestic citizenship debates in the Baltic. Liberalism failed to deliver substantively better relations with Russia through institutional members. More fundamentally, the friction is born out of differing ideas, values, norms, and narratives which in turn give life and shape to the interest, institutions, and rhetoric. This constructivist approach to identity, interest, and institution creation helps to fill the gap left in the debate between the more traditional liberal institutionalist or zero-sum realist explanations. The following sections will combine both the Russian interest in the Baltic with their history of grievance and divergent narratives in order to bridge the gap between rational and constructed interests.

Russian Interest in the Baltic Region

The Russian empire, in its various manifestations, has dominated the Eurasian landmass for centuries. Despite its vast territorial breadth, Russia has been practically landlocked, with the frigid oceans constraining it to the north and west while the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits limit its maritime ambitions from the Black Sea. In short, most of Russia's ports is either restricted by sea ice during the winter or are in the Black Sea, making those ports strategically vulnerable to the whims of the Turkish government. The exceptions are the arctic port of Murmansk and Russia's highly militarized Kaliningrad exclave on the Baltic sea. Located between Poland and Lithuania and separated from the motherland by over 200 miles, Kaliningrad offers Russia both a warm water port for its navy and a wedge to drive between central Europe and the Baltic states.

Situated on the Baltic Sea and sparsely populated, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania offer far more to Russia by their geography than they do via their economies. Like most of Europe, the Baltic states are highly reliant on Russian natural gas imports to power their economies. This dependence is both a reflection of the disparity in energy wealth and a vestige of Soviet infrastructure centrally planned by, and designed to benefit, Moscow. Regulatory pressure from the EU, increased usage of renewable energy, and source diversification via Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) imports have modestly reduced the Russian monopolistic advantages in the Baltics. Baltic natural gas consumption in 2015 only accounted for 2% of Russian natural gas exports, down from 3.5% of Russian exports in 1992, a trend mirrored in the volume of gas consumed (U.S. Energy Information Administration). While this decrease in consumption has resulted in a smaller market for Russian gas, even at its peak the Baltic market was only a small part of Russia's global gas trade. Moreover, despite regulatory pressures and efforts to curtail consumption, Russia continues to supply the Baltic states with almost all of their gas and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Accordingly, continued Russian interest in the Baltic is tied to its territorial, not economic or cultural significance.

The loss of Baltic territory following the Soviet collapse cut Kaliningrad off from Russia. Because Kaliningrad is an exclave Russia cannot reap the economic benefits that a typical port would provide because Russia's ability to import and export goods are constrained by the need to transport everything through Lithuania, at least during the dead of winter when other Russian ports are blocked by ice. Additionally, Kaliningrad is reliant on oil and gas from pipelines that run through Lithuania, which provides Vilnius a valuable hedge against exploitation in negotiations with Moscow.

These complications would be greatly reduced if the Baltic states had followed the path of Belarus and remained in the Russian orbit and would be eliminated altogether if they were folded back into the Russian Federation. Instead, the Baltic states' westward drift has eliminated Russia's strategic buffer states and brought NATO troops to Russian borders. Baltic membership in NATO represents a violation of NATO's supposed promise not to expand eastward, and in the process denied Russia the buffer with the West that it enjoyed during the Soviet period. Given its vast domain, history has taught Russia that defending its borders is best accomplished by territorial buffers and an offensive posture. Global regimes may change, but a new Napoleon or Hitler is likely to turn an eye to the east. Better to defeat such a foe in someone else's country than await his arrival on Russian territory (Steil, 2018).

Denied of its historic buffer, the Baltic states' Western allegiance brings confrontation with NATO to Russian borders. Once again assertive on the world stage, Russia seems intent on disproving any lingering notions of American unipolarity, a hegemonic framework whose global permanence is

premised on liberal institutions like the EU and NATO. Small states, like Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, chose to bandwagon with the West for a multitude of reasons, but chief among them were political and economic benefits of the EU and the security guarantee offered by NATO. NATO's allure is the promise of mutual defense articulated in Article 5, by which the geopolitical allegiance of small states is used to purchase the military might of global powers, namely the United States of America. Article 5 is the glue that binds NATO together. By expanding to Russia's doorstep, NATO has cloaked the Baltics in their protection and laid the sanctity of Article 5 on the western bank of the Narva River, among other places.

In the past decade, Russia has held the line against further NATO expansion. By fomenting separatist movements and ensuring the perpetuation of frozen conflicts, Russia has exercised its *de facto* veto power over NATO membership for Moldova, Georgia, and most recently, Ukraine. Russian intervention in Syria has thus far ensured the survival of the Assad regime, maintained strategic access to the Syrian port of Tartus, and flexed Russian muscle on a global stage. Most recently, the annexation of Crimea marks an inflection point in the Kremlin's efforts to stop Western incursion into Russian frontiers. Having shown NATO unwilling or unable to defend an aspirant nation, painfully apparent in the case of Ukraine, the probable next phase of Russian strategy is to claw back the territory seized during Russia's decade of weakness following the Soviet collapse. Direct confrontation with the Western alliance to restore the Warsaw pact would be expensive, risk nuclear annihilation, and be unlikely to succeed. However, opportunistic aggression against specific NATO vulnerabilities would subject Western leaders to an unenviable dilemma: either risk full scale war with a reinvigorated Russia to defend otherwise insignificant territory in a small NATO state, or admit on the world stage that Article 5 is an empty promise and watch the alliance crumble from within (Kirchik, 2017).

One Country, Two Societies: The Russo-Estonian Rift

The last century of Estonian history has been in large part defined by its dysfunctional relationship with Russia. Opposing views of the role of the Soviet Union in Europe during World War II, post-Soviet treatment of ethnic Russians, and Western political allegiances have solidified the rift between Tallinn and Moscow. This rift has manifested itself in divergent narratives, cultural estrangement, hostile governmental and economic policies, and cyber warfare.

For Estonians, their nation has always been situated in the middle of larger powers. Successively dominated by the Swedes, Germans, and Russians, Estonians have limited history as an independent people, both in terms of sovereignty and culture. After the fall of the Czarist regime, Estonia overcame both German troops and Soviet Russians, carving out its own state, whose sovereignty was enshrined in the 1920 Treaty of Tartu. This treaty holds great significance in the modern Estonian state, which traces its legal sovereignty back to Tartu (Aalto, 2008, p. 48).

The tumult of World War II ended the dream of Estonian independence, subjecting the tiny nation to the successive depredations of the Soviet and Nazi regimes. Divergent accounts of the history surrounding World War II are central to the mutually exclusive Russian and Estonian narratives. For Estonians, the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact represents a betrayal of the Treaty of Tartu. The Soviets occupied the Baltics by force in 1940 before Hitler turned on Stalin and sent Nazi forces into the Baltics in 1941. For Estonians, the Soviets came not as liberators from Nazi oppression, but rather as occupiers no less culpable of violating Estonian sovereignty than their German predecessors. For Russians, the Soviet Union was the heroic liberator of Europe in the Great Patriotic War (what Russians call World War II). Moreover, the incorporation of Estonia into the Soviet Union occurred not via the

action of a puppet regime installed by Moscow, but from the political will of the Estonian people (Grigas, 2013).

Since the fall of the Soviet Union there has been a consistent divergence, with the Baltic states claiming legitimacy based on a *status quo ante* inheritance of Pre-World War II sovereignty, which rejects the Russian narrative of European liberation and holds that five decades of Soviet occupation were illegal. Russia has become increasingly proud of its Soviet past and seeks to regain what it perceives as its rightful place in world politics. These views are incompatible, and the assertion of each state's identity is regarded by the other as an overtly hostile act since it challenges their self-constructed identity. The most relevant example of this antagonism based on mutually exclusive identities is the Russian Federation's 2005 rejection of the border treaty with Estonia. Despite signing the treaty, the Russian Duma refused to ratify the treaty when the Riigikogu, Estonia's parliament, incorporated language that referred to the legal continuity of the Estonia state flowing from Tartu in their ratification legislation (Ehin & Berg, 2009, p. 4).

These conflicting narratives have resulted in symbolic displays of Estonian sovereignty and garnered harsh responses from Moscow. In 2005 the Estonian and Lithuanian presidents refused to attend World War II victory celebrations in Moscow. Two years later, Estonian leaders relocated the Soviet "Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn" known commonly as the Bronze Soldier of Tallinn from the center of Tallinn to a military cemetery. Tensions born out of this relocation effort became emblematic of divergent narratives emanating from Moscow and Tallinn.

During the leadup to the March 2007 Estonian elections, the conservative Pro Patria party appealed to Estonian nationalist sentiments and pushed to remove the statue from the center of Tallinn. This effort was born out of the Estonian narrative that the monument memorializes the occupiers and oppressors of the Estonian people. In Russian state media, however, these efforts were attributed to Neo-Nazi skinheads and included unsubstantiated reports of the monument being vandalized with a swastika (Russia Today, 2007). By invoking Nazi iconography and attributing the relocation efforts to fascist factions, Russian media played directly to the Russian narrative of glorious liberation from Nazi occupation. After the election, the statue's relocation sparked protests from Estonia's Russophone population and angered Moscow. Two days of rioting coincided with sophisticated cyberattacks against Estonian government and political party websites. The following month, Russia halted energy shipments to Estonia under the guise of unspecified railway repairs (Zhdannikov, 2007). The controversy surrounding the Bronze soldier demonstrate the significance of clashing narratives. Assertion of the Estonian narrative was treated as a hostile act by Russia and provoked a coordinated response from Moscow that included uncorroborated state media reports during the Estonian election cycle, civil unrest, cyber warfare, and economic sanctions.

A Torn Social Fabric: Estranged Societies in a Small Nation

The estrangement between the Estonian and Russian governments has in many ways been mirrored within Estonia itself, with ethnic Estonian and Russian populations living in separate societies within one tiny nation. In 1940, Russians accounted for just under 10 percent of the Estonian population, but account for 26 percent of the population today. This growth is directly attributable to Russification efforts during Stalin's regime designed to privilege and increase the population of Russians in the other Soviet republics. Moreover, ethnic Russians tend to live in concentrated pockets. While much of the country is over ninety percent Estonian, the capital city of Tallinn and the eastern county of

Ida-Viru are home to large Russian and Russophone populations. In Tallinn, 37 percent of the population is Russian and 46 percent speak Russian. Ida-Viru is even more Russian, with Ethnic Russians accounting for 73 percent of the population and Russophones accounting for 80 percent (Grigas, 2016, pp. 156-157).

Ethnic and linguistic distinctions belie broader societal distinctions in political orientation, civil engagement, economic success, and religious affiliations. Generally, Russians in Estonia take their political cues from Moscow, feel estranged from the Estonian government, have fallen behind their Estonian neighbors economically, and adhere to the Russian Orthodox Church in a country that is predominantly areligious. Estonians and Russians speak different languages in their daily lives, go to different schools, consume different media, and accept different narratives as true history. These distinctions are reinforced by a narrative of grievance born out of discriminatory citizenship policies.

Following the fall of the Soviet Union, Estonians were intent ensuing political autonomy from Moscow and consequently were wary of the potential political power of a unified Russian voting bloc in a country as small as Estonia. While not explicitly targeted at the Russian population, Estonia only granted automatic citizenship to inhabitants who were citizens or descendants of citizens prior to the Soviet occupation. Immigrants during the occupation and their descendants had to apply for citizenship or accept an alien passport, which allowed for legal residency but restricted civil rights. Applicants for citizenship must demonstrate proficiency in the Estonian language. A Finnic tongue, Estonian is particularly foreign to the Slavic ear of Estonia's Russophone population. Accordingly, linguistic proficiency has created a particularly onerous hurdle and amounts to a *de facto* barrier to citizenship for ethnic Russians.

Once again, divergent narratives account for the dispute over citizenship policies. Tallinn cites a doctrine of continuation that traces Estonian sovereignty, and thus citizenship rights, to their brief period of independence prior to Soviet occupation. Conversely, Moscow holds that since Estonia voluntarily joined the Soviet Union, immigrants to Estonia who were welcomed as new citizens during the Soviet era have a legal right to citizenship that is unaffected by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Regardless of legal reasoning, the practical effect of the Estonian policy has been to deny ethnic Russians a voice in their governance and all but insured that Estonia's foreign policy orientation would align with Brussels and Washington, not Moscow. Despite halfhearted integration efforts, progress has been made and the actual number of resident aliens has decreased over the years, dropping to seven percent in recent years (Grigas, 2016, p. 154). This has not stopped Russian media from continuing to rail against the discriminatory minority policies in Estonia.

This discrimination extends beyond citizenship and voting rights to matters of employment. Estonian law requires linguistic proficiency in both Estonian and Russian for employment in fields requiring communication with the public, such as government officials, medical professionals, teachers, and police. While this law may be a well-intentioned attempt to make government services accessible to all people, in practice the bilingual requirement effectively closes public sector professions to large portions of the Russophone minority, limiting their economic opportunities and denying them a role in public policy development and implementation (Conley & Gerber, 2011, p. 11).

Exploiting Cultural Cleavage: From Disaffected Compatriots to Russian Intervention

Russians in Estonia are in a very real sense separate from their Estonian countrymen. A history of grievance on both sides underscores the societal rift. To many Russians in Estonia, their best

advocates do not sit in Tallinn, but rather, advocate for them from the Kremlin. This section has outlined the fact that while Estonia's Russian population may live in the Western world, their world view and culture are firmly part of the Russian world. The next section will explain how this sense of a separate, Russian compatriot identity that exists in Estonia has been incorporated in Moscow's broader geopolitical ambitions.

Unifying the Russian World: Compatriots & Hybrid Warfare

Estonia's Russian population is neither unique nor accidental in the post-Soviet world. On a practical level, as the Iron Curtain fell, Moscow lacked the economic means to allow the Russian diaspora, intentionally dispatched to Russify the Soviet Union decades earlier, to return home. Moreover, on the strategic level, maintaining enduring Russian populations in former Soviet republics would ensure Russia's continued cultural influence in the newly independent Eastern bloc. In the past two decades, this Russian diaspora, or compatriots as they are often called, has been formally incorporated into the foreign policy strategy of the Russian Federation. This strategy has three major goals: restore Russian economic and military might, stop Western incursion in eastern Europe, and ultimately, restore the Russian empire. Russian compatriots are key to each of these goals.

Baltic energy and security researcher Agnia Grigas argues that Russian re-imperialization efforts begin with seemingly benign displays of cultural soft power and culminate ultimately in annexation. Her framework is not a linear progression of Russian efforts, but rather a spectrum of geopolitical tools to reestablish Moscow's cultural, economic, security, and political supremacy in its near abroad. On the benign end of the spectrum, Russia uses soft power to achieve influence with Russian sympathizers via humanitarian support and the advancement of Russian language and culture. Russia also selectively offers citizenship and passports to these Russian sympathizers, or compatriots, increasing their ties and allegiances to Moscow. Information warfare leverages the dominance of Russian state media outlets in Russian language programming to push Kremlin narratives and undermine the legitimacy and influence of Western governments with Russians living abroad. On the coercive end of the spectrum, Russia uses a self-proclaimed responsibility to protect all Russians everywhere to justify the use of its military under the auspices of peace keeping, either to perpetuate frozen conflicts or simply to annex territory (Grigas, 2016, pp. 9-10).

The campaign that Grigas describes is often referred to as hybrid warfare because it pursues competition not just on the battlefield, but across a multidimensional battlespace that encompasses culture, information, and ideology. The Russian doctrine of hybrid warfare imagines a "perpetual war" broadly contested between Russia and the West (Thornton & Karagiannis, 2016, p. 331). In such a war, previous doctrinal distinctions between combatant and non-combatant, physical and psychological, and kinetic and non-kinetic dissolve (Hoffman, 2007, p. 27). The purpose of hybrid warfare is to sow division and doubt among the polity of an adversary to destabilize and undermine the adversary's ability to govern and mobilize a response (Thornton & Karagiannis, 2016, p. 333). By sowing this confusion, Russia is allowed a freer hand to accomplish its objectives via a variety of means, including the more traditional use of military force.

In 2005, Lieutenant General James Mattis, now the American Secretary of Defense, wrote in his capacity as Commanding General of Marine Corps Combat Development Command that hybrid warfare is the "merger of different modes and means of war" which expands both the players of the game to include non-state actors and the field of competition to include corporations, computer networks, and

streams of information. In Mattis' conception of hybrid warfare, ultimately ideas are paramount and intellectual innovation and agility are more decisive than traditional metrics of military strength (Mattis & Hoffman, 2005). Accepting Mattis' premise that hybrid warfare boils down to competition of ideas and ideology, Grigas' breakdown of Russia's neo-imperialist methods provides a useful framework for how Russia translates ideas into power in the Baltics and beyond.

Soft Power: Culture and Compatriots in an Expanding Russian World

Russia exploits its soft power based on the Russian language and Orthodox sect to expand its cultural influence. To this end, Moscow has opened Russkiy Mir chapters throughout eastern Europe, ostensibly to promote Russian language and culture through education, art, and cultural exchange. These chapters also serve as fronts for agents of the Russian government acting to further Russian state interests, with former Soviet intelligence officers serving in cadre positions in the Estonian chapter of Russkiy Mir (Conley & Gerber, 2011, p. 15).

Beyond formal government supported efforts, the Russian Orthodox Church acts as a vehicle for Russian influence. Dogged by accusations of ties to the KGB, Patriarch Kirill I of Moscow has described the leadership of Vladimir Putin as "a miracle of God" and has used the power of the pulpit to bestow moral legitimacy on Russian geopolitical efforts. Speaking of Russia's growing role in the world, Patriarch Kirill commented, "the civilization of Russia belongs to something broader than the Russian Federation. This civilization we call the Russian world.... To this world can belong people who do not belong to the Slavic world, but who embraced the cultural and spiritual component of this world as their own." (Grigas, 2016, p. 32)

As the Moscow Patriarchy ministers to a Russian world with an increasingly broad definition, the Kremlin has turned this Russian diaspora, or compatriots, into a geopolitical lever. The actual definition of a Russian compatriot is fluid, allowing Moscow to change its definition to serve evolving objectives and interests. Most narrowly defined as Russian citizens living abroad, compatriots can be expanded to include ethnic Russians, Russian speakers, adherents of the Orthodox faith, any peoples who were Russified during the Czarist and Soviet empires, or as Patriarch Kirill suggests, anyone, anywhere, who has "embraced the cultural and spiritual component of [the Russian] world as their own." This expansive definition of Russian state interest and responsibility has served as the rationale for a range of Russian activities abroad, from humanitarian and diplomatic support to more overt forms of intervention (Grigas, 2016, p. 37).

Moscow has pursued humanitarian assistance for its compatriots throughout the Russian world, using its power within the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to protest the mistreatment of Russians around the globe. Claiming that Estonian and Latvian citizenship policies are evidence of systemic discrimination and humanitarian abuse against ethnic Russians, Moscow lobbied against the Baltic states, seeking to undermine their legitimacy with the Western world. Ironically, Latvian laws that separated nationality and citizenship are conceptually borne out of Soviet policies that made the same distinction. Similarly, Estonian laws that make citizenship contingent on language proficiency mirror Soviet-era Russification policies designed to privilege Russian language and culture over Estonian language and culture. In reality, while specific laws may have had deleterious effects on the Russian compatriots living in Estonia and Latvia, international investigations initiated at the behest of Moscow have failed to find evidence of widespread discrimination (Grigas, 2016, pp. 151-154). However, the mere intimation of systemic abuse further

reinforced the Kremlin's narrative of Moscow as the guardian of human rights and protector of Russian culture.

Building on the narratives of grievance borne out of abuses of Russian compatriots, Moscow has issued passports to certain communities of Russian compatriots throughout its near abroad. These passports provide compatriots with economic, educational, and travel opportunities in Russia. More importantly for the Kremlin, the passports cement the narrative of Moscow as benevolent protectors and further estrange Russian compatriots from the nations in which they reside. In Estonia and Latvia, such policies are a practical response to the citizenship laws seen as unfair to ethnic Russians. Additionally, passport policies reinforce Moscow's compatriot base, turning ethnic Russians and Russophones living abroad into Russian citizens. This, in turn, confers more legitimacy on Kremlin efforts to support these compatriots, as it is easier to justify actions taken to protect the interests of citizens than people who have only a linguistic or cultural connection to Russia.

Energy Dependence and Economic Leverage

In addition to cultural soft power, Russia exercises economic leverage, primarily through the politics of energy supply, to advance the interests of the Russian Federation in its near abroad (Grigas, 2017, p. 96). This energy leverage is particularly effective in the Baltics, whose small economies are almost entirely dependent on Russian natural gas. Through state owned energy firms such as Gazprom and Rosneft, Russia is able to tie both the price and the consistent supply of energy to political considerations in markets where it has a monopolistic advantage. While Russia has used oil supplies for political purposes, notably cutting off the rail-based oil shipments as a result of the Bronze Soldier dispute, natural gas offers more strategic leverage.

Oil is supplied by a large number of countries, it is easily transported around the globe via a vast network of pipelines and maritime shipping, and it is priced and traded on a global market. No such global market exists for natural gas and while the development and proliferation of LNG technology has brought new competitors to the market, the bulk of natural gas still travels through pipelines. The price of that gas, as well as restrictions against the sale to third parties, is negotiated bilaterally. The resultant agreements are almost always secret (Grigas, 2017, pp. 48-53). Consequently, while Russia has large amounts of both oil and gas, natural gas offers more leverage because it allows Russia to make separate deals with every country it supplies, extracting concessions from adversaries while rewarding its friends.

Russia has enjoyed dominance over the European gas market for nearly five decades and has a monopoly in the markets of many individual states. Eager to sate the energy demand of growing economies, European states traded pipes for gas and constructed infrastructure to bring Russian gas through the Iron Curtain. These "friendship" pipelines moved gas from Russia through other Soviet Republics and Warsaw Pact nations and into the West (Grigas, 2017, p. 102). After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia's gas infrastructure suddenly lay in countries who were no longer under Moscow's direct control, most notably Ukraine. To mitigate the complications posed by the newfound autonomy of transit states, Russia embarked on a campaign to retain, or if necessary regain, ownership of existing pipelines, and where practical, create new pipelines to bypass transit states altogether. The primary vehicle for these initiatives is the Gazprom State Gas Concern. Gazprom evolved out of the Soviet Ministry of Gas Industry to become a joint venture between private business and the national government. Despite privatization, the Kremlin continues to exercise close control over Gazprom's

activities. Vladimir Putin described “Gazprom [as] a powerful political and economic lever of influence over the rest of the world,” (Grigas, 2017, p. 115).

With its political utility, Gazprom’s activities must balance market forces and business opportunities against strategic direction from Moscow. This subjugation of business to strategic interest places burdens on Gazprom, most notably the requirement to provide gas at to domestic residential consumers at significantly discounted prices (Grigas, 2017, p. 129). Despite such burdens, often strategic objectives for Russia align with the business interests of Gazprom. For instance, the Nord Stream pipelines, which pump Russian gas under the Baltic Sea directly to Germany, allow Gazprom to export directly to key European markets without the risks of siphoning and unpaid debts they assume by shipping the gas through Ukraine. Moreover, the full utilization of the Nord Stream pipelines would save Gazprom an estimated two billion dollars in transit fees annually by completely bypassing Ukraine (Adomeit, 2016). For the Kremlin, the benefits are clear. Ukraine is weakened economically, Kiev loses the limited leverage it had over Moscow via gas transit, and Russia successfully exploits existing rifts within Europe by selectively supplying Germany and western Europe directly. This adds to a growing European divide seen to benefit west over east, north over south, and rich over poor (Gurzu, 2017). The seabed pipeline also bypasses the Baltic states, leaving them isolated from the rest of the European gas infrastructure.

The Baltic states inherited centrally planned Soviet infrastructure never designed to facilitate the autonomy and security of independent states. Accordingly, the Baltic Market is essentially a gas island, meaning that the pipelines that supply them with fuel end in the Baltic. This Soviet inheritance was not completely without advantages: Latvia’s Inčukalns underground gas storage facility provides a key buffer in supply and until its final closure in 2009, Lithuania’s Ignalia nuclear facility produced electricity independent of the whims of Moscow. Unfortunately, while Estonia has significant oil shale reserves in its eastern counties, Latvia and Lithuania lack any appreciable domestic energy resources whatsoever. As a result, the Baltic states share a common dependence on Russian imports for virtually all of their natural gas consumption. The combination of isolation and dependence allows Russia to selectively pressure the Baltics without affecting energy deliveries to Germany and other key European states.

Information Warfare: Manipulating the Narrative to Mobilize Society

Just as the Kremlin takes advantage of Russian energy dominance, Russia also seeks to dominate the information sphere to support its aforementioned cultural, economic, and diplomatic efforts in the Russian world. Additionally, the Kremlin seeks to promulgate conspiratorial and populist narratives into the Western world in order to undermine confidence and support for governments in the West. As Russia pursues more specific objectives through coercion, information is weaponized to provide pretext for Russian military action and manipulate the reporting of the resultant conflicts. Accordingly, information warfare serves two roles: first, it provides a vehicle to accomplish Russia’s broad cultural and political goals, and second, it paves the way for Russian interventions and supports existing Russian military action (Darczewska, 2015, pp. 5-6).

In 2000, Russia formally incorporated information warfare as both a means to counter vaguely defined Western threats and provide for the “improvement and protection of the domestic information infrastructure and integration of Russia into the world information domain.” There is nothing particularly new about this approach. Though not formalized until World War II, Russia’s extensive use

of propaganda can be traced back to the October revolution. *Spetspropaganda*, or special propaganda theory, was introduced as a dedicated field of study in the Russian Military Institute of Foreign Languages in 1942 and remained an integral discipline within Russian military thought until the fall of the Soviet Union. Doctrinally, it sought to take control of mass media, subordinating journalism and entertainment to the international and domestic objectives of the Russian government (Grigas, 2016, pp. 44-45).

When Vladimir Putin reintroduced *spetspropaganda* as part of Russia's Information Security Doctrine in 2000, it was less a fundamental shift than it was a return to the norm (Grigas, 2016, p. 46). Conceptually, Russian information warfare can be broken down into objectives, narratives, and methods. The objectives of *spetspropaganda* remain unchanged from the Soviet era; Russia aggressively employs propaganda to obfuscate its actions, divert from unfavorable narratives, pursue intimidation and sabotage campaigns against its adversaries, silence domestic dissent, solidify political will, and foment unrest abroad (Darczewska, 2015, p. 7).

To these ends, Russia promulgates narratives of Russian heroism and military might, the spiritual superiority of Russian culture, the unjust and false nature of American hegemony, and the encirclement of Russia by an aggressive West (Darczewska, 2015, p. 8). Recent years have seen a significant effort to recast the Soviet Union not as Hitler's coconspirators in the carving up of Europe but as the heroic liberators of Europe (Grigas, 2013, pp. 128-129). Russian special forces are deified and military technology is debuted to remind the world that Russia is a capable nuclear superpower. History and hard power narratives dovetail nicely with Russian notions of spiritual superiority. As a land-based power, Russians have connections to the land and the spiritual world that are superior to their materialistic, maritime rivals in Britain and the United States. The Kremlin's abandonment of communism has allowed the Orthodox sect to return to prominence, casting Moscow as "eternal Rome" defending Slavic spiritual superiority from assaults by "eternal Carthage" embodied by the materialistic West (Kirchik, 2017, pp. 20-21). This conveniently excuses economic stagnation as a necessary consequence of a struggle with the Western world replete with the evils of materialism. Russia also casts Europe and members of the "Atlantic Alliance" as puppets of Washington, seeking to undermine unity in the West while reinforcing familiar domestic storylines. The notion of Russia as a citadel besieged in all directions by a hostile West solidifies domestic unity and provides rhetorical justification for Russian geopolitical maneuvering (Darczewska, 2015, p. 17).

While the objectives and narratives are largely unchanged from Soviet times, the advent of information technology coupled with the decentralization of Western media have resulted in a methodological revolution that has broadened Russia's reach and lowered the barriers for entry into Western markets. The combination of the anonymity of the internet and the enshrinement of free speech in the Western world has allowed Russia to bypass old constraints and communicate directly with disaffected populations throughout the world. State sponsored media, most notably the affiliates of *Russia Today*, provides a façade of journalistic legitimacy to stories that select, omit, shade, or outright falsify facts to pump Kremlin narratives specifically selected for the target audience (Yablokov, 2015). Moscow's deception, "is not so much to present an alternative to the actual truth, but rather to present a series of variants of the truth so that the target audience has no real idea what is actually true or untrue," (Thornton & Karagiannis, 2016, p. 336). To solidify domestic legitimacy and present Russia as a model of democracy, *Sputnik* championed the 2018 Russian presidential election as free and fair, highlighting the praise received by handpicked international observers. *Sputnik's* assertion is contested

by numerous independent, albeit Western, media organizations (Ingber, 2018). Abroad, Russia inserts journalistic chaos into foreign media to exacerbate existing divides. Indictments delivered by the special council for the American Justice Department outline dedicated efforts by the Russian Internet Research Agency to create false news stories and promulgate them in the United States via social media and the internet. While the firm's initial efforts sought to undermine support for Kiev and conceal the true extent of Russian activities in Ukraine, lessons learned in the Ukrainian campaign were used to target Western elections, most notably the 2016 American Presidential election (Ewing, 2018).

Estonia's large proportion of disaffected Russian residents makes it particularly vulnerable to information warfare campaigns. Estonian Russians primarily consume Russian media sources, accept Russian narratives as reliable, and hold Western media to be anti-Putin and anti-Russian. In all practical purposes, Estonians and Russians live in separate information spaces (Dougherty & Kaljurand, 2015, pp. 2-4). Not surprisingly, the populations hold divergent views on NATO membership, the value of the EU, Russian intervention in Ukraine, and other similar points of contention between Russia and the West. For instance, in a 2016 survey, 88 percent of Estonian speakers support the presence of NATO troops in Estonia compared to only 29 percent of Russian speakers (Sarapik, 2016).

Such disparities in public opinion stem from the previously described estrangement of Russophones from Estonian government and civil society, offering fertile ground for Russian information warfare campaigns. Consumers of Russian media have numerous choices in Estonia. Estonia's most popular Russian language television network, First Baltic Channel (PBK) simply rebroadcasts popular Russian programs while the local affiliate of the Kremlin's Rossiya/RTR benefits from high production quality and large budgets flowing from a network that serves 30 million viewers world-wide (Dougherty & Kaljurand, 2015, p. 4). Aware of the obvious destabilizing potential of a steady diet of Kremlin crafted narratives, the Estonian government has tried to enter the Russian language television market. However, these efforts are constrained by budgets, that like their market, are very small. Rossiya reaches roughly one hundred times more viewers than there are Russophones in Estonia. Simply put, the small, low budget, and often campy Estonian efforts cannot effectively compete in a media market saturated by multiple Russian outlets that are supported by the Russian state and operate in a much broader market (Jõesaar, Rannu, & Jufereva, 2013, pp. 133-137).

From Cultural and Informational Competition to Military Force

This section has sought to marry the multimodal nature of hybrid warfare with Russian doctrine and revanchist aspirations. This asymmetric, cultural, and ideational competition is of obvious import for the West generally and for Estonia specifically. While the spectrum of Russian imperialism laid out by Grigas begins with soft power, it ends with hard power. The next section will explore cases that illustrate Russia's transition from a competition of cultures and ideas in the information space to the use of military force on the battlefield to achieve and solidify geopolitical ends.

Eastern Promises: Lessons from Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian efforts to rebuild its stature in its former possessions have become more assertive and that growing confidence has been made manifest in more coercive methods of influence. Information warfare targeted at disaffected populations does not simply undermine confidence in other governments; it is also used to create rhetorical pretext for military action. The objectives of these uses of force vary, but they are often the last phase and logical extension of a campaign that starts with soft power influence and ends with the application of hard power. In

applying hard power, Russia provides support to separatist movements, deploys Russian military forces under the pretext of humanitarian and peace keeping missions, and, in the case of Crimea, annexes territory.

While Russia has sought to expand its influence in many countries in the post-Soviet space, this paper will examine the cases of Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine. These governments share a common political and security inclination toward the West in the post-Soviet world. They are home to significant populations of ethnic Russians and Russophones. And most importantly, each has also experienced the coercive end of Russia's political toolkit.

Moldova: Peace Keepers and Frozen Conflicts

In Moldova, the fall of the Soviet Union precipitated a schism along language lines when the Moldovan government reinstated Romanian as the official language. In the eastern border region of Transnistria, Russian compatriots declared independence from Chişinău. In this case, Russian compatriots are primarily defined linguistically and not ethnically as they are composed of Ukrainians, Moldovans, and Russians. At first, this schism received tepid response in Moscow, but over time the Kremlin has grasped the utility of fomenting and maintaining conflict in Transnistria (Grigas, 2016, pp. 99-10). By preventing resolution, Moldova could not join NATO or the EU despite the wishes of Chişinău as the West is loath to inherit border disputes. Additionally, Russia has provided Transnistrian separatists with an estimated five billion dollars in natural gas via Gazprom while assigning the bill for that gas to the entire nation of Moldova, giving Moscow leverage over Chişinău (Grigas, 2016, p. 113). The Kremlin maintains a consulate in the Transnistrian capital of Tiraspol allowing Russia to give the separatist movement legitimacy, pay out Russian government funded pensions to compatriots, and provide Russian passports to Transnistrians. After receiving the support of Soviet troops in the initial independence movement, Tiraspol has had the continuous support of the Russian military in the form of self-described peace keeping forces as well as training for its own forces (Grigas, 2016, pp. 130-131). Moldova illustrates how Russia has pursued a hybrid campaign that includes the military support of separatist movements to perpetuate a frozen conflict, thereby freezing the advance of NATO and the EU.

Georgia: Changing Borders Through Force to Protect Russian Compatriots

Unlike Moldova, where Russia inherited a separatist movement and learned as it went, Moscow's campaign in Georgia, which culminated in a 2008 Russian military intervention, is a case study in the dedicated execution of the full spectrum of hybrid war. Georgia occupies a commanding position on the Black Sea, has significant offshore energy reserves, would be key to the construction of pipelines to bring Caspian energy to European markets, and sits between Russia and its Armenian allies (Grigas, 2016, pp. 107-108). The Georgian provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia are home to Russian separatist movements. Both provinces border Russia and the residents primarily speak Russian. As in Moldova, they are linguistic, not ethnic, compatriots. The Russian province of Ossetia sits on the northern side of the border and the narrative of Ossetian unification under the Russian Federation offers Moscow an avenue for exploitation. For their part, the Abkhazians are estranged from their ethnic Georgian countrymen stemming from their persecution under Stalin, who sought to 'Georgify' Abkhazians, willingly or otherwise. Ironically, since the fall of the Soviet Union, the resultant bitterness toward Georgians has caused Abkhazians to look to Moscow for support, even though it was from Moscow that Stalin oppressed them decades earlier. These compatriots living just south of Russia's

borders hold Russian passports, have easy access to Russian media, and share the Orthodox faith, albeit not under the canonical control of the Moscow Patriarchy (Grigas, 2016, pp. 98-99).

As in Moldova, Gazprom provided subsidized gas to Russian compatriots in Georgia while leveraging Tbilisi's dependence to extract political concessions. After interruptions in supply in 2006, Georgia sought out other sources of energy, mainly from Azerbaijan, and Russia responded with trade embargos against Georgian goods. The combination of disaffected compatriots and economic distress served both as justification for the perpetual deployment of peace keeping troops to Georgia as well as humanitarian missions designed to strengthen compatriot ties to Moscow. Additionally, pro-Russian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), political parties, and candidates advocated for Georgia to join the Eurasian Economic Union with increasing force, likely as the result of Kremlin support and control (Grigas, 2016, pp. 113-115). Such meddling attenuated existing divides within Georgian society. To further solidify its hold on Russian compatriots, the Kremlin restricted travel in Russia for Georgian citizens while simultaneously distributing Russian passports in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. From 2002 to 2006, the number of Russian citizens in each region practically doubled, with 80 percent of Abkhazians and 90 percent of South Ossetians holding Russian passports (Grigas, 2016, p. 120). Coupled with the Russian peace keeping forces that had been continuously deployed to those regions since 1992, Russia succeeded in manufacturing a population just beyond its borders that it was obliged to defend.

In 2004, as NATO membership expanded dramatically into central and eastern Europe, Georgia elected Mikheil Sakaashvili to the presidency. Educated in America, Sakaashvili championed EU and NATO membership for Georgia. Following NATO's Bucharest summit in spring 2008, NATO announced that it supported Georgian and Ukrainian applications for a Membership Action Plan (NATO, 2008). Wary of NATO expansion, opposed to Sakaashvili's western inclinations, and covetous of the Abkhazian coast on the Black Sea, Russia weaponized the compatriot population that it had carefully cultivated for over a decade (Cohen & Hamilton, 2011, p. iii). To this end Russia promulgated uncorroborated reports of ethnic cleansing perpetrated by Georgians against Ossetians, highlighted the threat to their peacekeepers, and adopted the Western parlance of R2P, or Responsibility to Protect, as a justification for the use of force (Grigas, 2016, pp. 130-131). Frustrated by the expanded Russian interference and erosion of sovereignty in its borders, Georgia sought to push back militarily. The deployment of Georgia armor to South Ossetia was reactionary, uninformed by a broader strategic objective, and evinced a dearth operational preparation. The Russian response, in contrast, was the result of years of planning and preparation. Unsurprisingly, the result was overwhelming. Despite tactical deficiencies, Russian operational superiority resulted in the complete control of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as well as significant degradations in Georgian military capabilities (Cohen & Hamilton, 2011, pp. 6-7). Only 19 days passed from the start of the war to Russian recognition of independent sovereign states in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, with substantial fighting last only a few days.

The Russo-Georgian war also highlights the integration of cyberwarfare into conventional Russian military operations. Through Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) campaigns, Russia effectively took down Georgian government, finance, and media sector websites. As Russian planes and tanks bludgeoned the Georgian military in South Ossetia, Russian hackers brought the whole of Georgian society to a standstill (Grigas, 2016, pp. 125-126). In Georgia, Kremlin narratives solidified divisions between Tbilisi and Russian compatriots. Internationally, similar narratives were deployed to provide a rhetorical case for Russian intervention. Having successfully used the information space to prepare both the local population and the international community for war, Russia then turned to cyber warfare to

deny Georgia access to the information space, giving Moscow a near monopoly on the information flowing into and out of Georgia during the conflict. Following the conflict, Russia continued the war in both the domestic and international information space, casting Sakaashvili as a murderous war criminal responsible for a claimed Ossetian genocide. This provided the Kremlin the dual benefit of undermining the domestic political support for the pro-Western Sakaashvili while manufacturing moral relativism between the West and East by casting Sakaashvili as the West's Milosevic (Cohen & Hamilton, 2011, p. 4). The Georgian campaign illustrates the fluidity with which Russia transitions from information warfare to cyber warfare.

The strategic implications of the Georgian conflict are stunning. Russia used military force to change the borders in European state³ with no appreciable Western response, weakening the respect for territorial sovereignty enshrined in the Helsinki accords. Despite espousing its commitment to the territorial sovereignty of Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, NATO did not act (NATO, 2008). Such hesitation can be tied to a number of factors; Georgia was not a member of NATO, the United States was involved in two increasingly unpopular wars already, and at the superficial level, Georgia initiated hostilities in South Ossetia. However, through Western inaction, Russia established vassal states in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, reaping the benefit of them as a territorial buffer while slowly absorbing them into the Russian Federation (Grigas, 2016, pp. 133-134). By separating the use of military force temporally from an eventual incorporation into Putin's Novorossiia, the Kremlin will be able to cast their eventual annexation as a political process and not Russian aggression. Moreover, Russia achieved its primary strategic aim: NATO expansion in the Caucasus was halted.

Clear messages were sent around the region. In the buildup to the conflict, Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko sided with Saakashvili and sought to limit Russian access to key Black Sea ports. In the aftermath, Ukraine elected pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich who promptly abandoned NATO and EU membership ambitions and signed away the key Black Sea port of Sevastopol to the Russian Navy (Cohen & Hamilton, 2011, pp. 1-2). This expanded control of the Black Sea coupled with the elimination of Western ambitions in the Caucasus solidified Russian control over Caspian energy flows, protecting Russian energy from potential competitors.

The Georgian conflict illustrates how the Kremlin weaponized narratives, allowing Russia to execute a coordinated cyber and military campaign to seize the sovereign territory of another state. The West's failure to respond is even more egregious because in large part the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 was a direct consequence of Georgia's desire for NATO membership. In this way, Georgia's pro-Western posture did not serve as a hedge against Russian revanchist aspirations, but rather made Georgia more of a target for Russian aggression.

Ukraine: Bringing the Brother Nation to Heal through Hybrid War and Annexation

While the Russo-Georgian war signaled Russian willingness to check Western political and security expansion with military force, significant portions of the Ukrainian population continued to support EU membership. When Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich abandoned negotiations with the EU in favor of Russia's Eurasian Economic Union in November 2013, protesters filled the streets of

³ Definitions of Europe vary, with the Caucasus occasionally being assigned to Asia or Europe, often for purposes of intellectual convenience. Distinctions on the Eurasian landmass are primarily cultural and political, not geographic. What is clear is that Georgia is a member of the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe, and through Russian military action, the borders of Georgia were altered.

Kiev's Maidan, a public square in the heart of the city. Despite a compromise that allowed Yanukovich to remain president until new elections could be held, Yanukovich fled Kiev and took refuge in Russia (Kirchik, 2017, p. 207).

The prospect of Ukraine, the breadbasket of Europe and a fellow Slavic nation, joining the EU, and worse yet NATO, was absolutely unacceptable to the Kremlin. Moreover, the concept of a localized protest springing from the genuine aspirations of the people, unconnected to the machinations of great power politics did not fit in the Russian view of international relations. Kiev's Maidan was the latest in a series of pro-Western demonstrations in the post-Soviet space to include Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004, and even on the streets of Moscow in 2011. While the Kremlin succeeded in quelling unrest on its own streets, other revolutions had resulted in governments keen to affiliate with Europe. Given its own history of manipulating narratives to foment unrest in neighboring governments, to the Kremlin the protests in Kiev were the latest iteration of an American attempt to generate a "Russian Spring" in Moscow's backyard (Kirchik, 2017, p. 207).

In response, Russia engaged in a broad campaign that brought to bear all elements of its hybrid warfare doctrine and leveraged the fruits of two decades worth of dedicated compatriot policies to weaponize Ukraine's Russian speaking population. The Ukrainian campaign serves as the most complete example of Russian hybrid warfare as articulated by Chief of the Russian Army General Staff, Valery Gerasimov; an asymmetric, undeclared war "combining the political, economic, humanitarian, and other non-military measures – applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population," (Kirchik, 2017, p. 215).

The Ukrainian campaign can be conceptually broken into two phases: the annexation of Crimea which was completed in less than a month, and an ongoing separatist movement in the resource rich Donbass region of eastern Ukraine. Following Maidan, Russian special forces seized control of the Crimean legislature on February 27th, 2014. In coordination with the actions of Russian military forces, Russian hackers shut down Ukrainian government websites, located Ukrainian political officials in Crimea via their smart phones, and took control of the Ukrtelecom communications company. These actions effectively isolated Crimea from the Ukrainian mainland during the critical opening hours of the campaign. Exploiting Crimea's status as an autonomous region within Ukraine, Russia installed a puppet government that promptly called for a referendum in support of joining the Russian Federation over the objections of Kiev. With a reported 20,000 Russian troops present during the vote, the referendum prevailed on March 18th, 2014. Russia reported nearly unanimous support, but these results have been largely dismissed by the world community as a sham.⁴ The next phase began in earnest on April 11th, 2014 when Russian troops entered the Donbass region to support separatist movements fighting in the region. After achieving localized military supremacy, successful referendums were held in the border oblasts (provinces) of Donetsk and Luhansk on May 11th, 2014. These referendums were not for unification with Russia, as was the case in Crimea. Rather, the resultant "state sovereignty" for Donetsk and Luhansk resembled the autonomous but Russian-affiliated status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia from the Georgian campaign (Grigas, 2016, pp. 123-124, 127-128).

⁴ The published referendum result was 97% in favor with a turnout of 83%, figures that beggar belief (Kirchik, 2017, p. 213). Seemingly on accident, the president of the Russian Council on Civil Society and Human Rights offered a less rosy picture of the result and turnout in a quickly deleted blog post: "50–60 percent voted for unification with Russia, with a turnout of 30–50 percent," (Grigas, 2016, p. 127).

The scale, duration, and human cost distinguish the Ukrainian conflict from the Russian interventions on Moldova and Georgia. While the Crimean annexation is *de facto* settled, the struggle in the Donbass continues despite numerous attempts to achieve a cease fire. In the process, an estimated 10,300 people have been killed and an estimated 1.6 million people have been forced to leave their homes (Center for Preventive Action, 2018). At times the conflict has threatened to take on broader international implications.

On July 17th, 2014 Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine and crashed in Donetsk oblast. Western investigators attribute responsibility to Russian separatists operating a Russian made SA-11 Buk surface to air missile system. Russia rejects this finding, contending instead that the Boeing 777 was downed either as a result of a CIA plot or shot down by Ukrainian military aircraft. However, in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, Russian Colonel Igor Dirkin took to Russian social media network Vkontakte to take credit for the downing of a Ukrainian AN-26 transport aircraft with a Buk missile system. The post was quickly deleted after news of the Malaysia Airlines crash was made public (Fitzpatrick, 2014). No such Ukrainian military aircraft was shot down. The investigation was complicated due to separatist control of the crash site, but witness testimony confirmed the presence of Buk missile systems in the area and analysis of the wreckage revealed damage consistent with a Buk missile. All 298 passengers and crew were killed, including 212 from NATO nations and another 27 from Australia (Schmid, Myint, MacDonald, & Sinha, 2014). While the crash sparked international outcry, there was little concrete action taken apart from civil legal actions against the airline and symbolic criminal indictments in Western courts against separatists in the Donbass (Grigas, 2016, p. 128).

The Ukraine campaign combined every aspect of Russian power. Soft power, both economic and cultural, were applied over decades and laid the groundwork for the campaign. Moscow settled Ukrainian gas debt on favorable terms in exchange for a long-term extension of Russia's lease on the Sevastopol naval base on the Crimean Peninsula, home to the Russian Black Sea Fleet (Grigas, 2017, pp. 187-188). This continued Russian military presence in Crimea facilitated the distribution of Russian passports throughout the region, transforming vaguely defined compatriots into credentialed Russian citizens. It also facilitated the military operations that precipitated the Crimean referendum and annexation. Through Russian sponsored cultural organizations developed years earlier, the Kremlin funneled money to pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine (Grigas, 2016, p. 39). As in previous campaigns, the sustained use of soft power was used to manufacture compelling Russian humanitarian security interests in the region. These claims were then used to support separatist movements in Crimea and the Donbass.

Russia dominated the information space with a sophisticated media blitz highlighted by close coordination between media efforts and kinetic military events. While Russia did exploit the internet in the Georgian campaign, both to push pro-Russian narratives and engage in cyber warfare, the advent of social media and the proliferation of smart phones added a new avenue for manipulation of the information space. To this end, the St. Petersburg based Internet Research Agency was formed in 2013 by Putin confidant Yevgeny Prigozhin. While the agency has gained increased attention in the Western world in the aftermath of the 2016 United States Presidential election,⁵ in 2014 it operated in obscurity

⁵ The Internet Research Agency is among the parties indicted by American Special Counsel Robert Mueller in February 2018. At its founding, the agency operated in Russian and Ukrainian and was solely focused on the Ukrainian campaign. In 2015, the agency expanded its operations to include Western languages and applied

with the express purpose of manipulating the Ukrainian population to delegitimize pro-EU movements and foment Russian separatism (Adler & McEwen, 2018).

Seeking to plug the holes left by more traditional media sources it employed copy writers, bloggers, and dedicated “trolls” – social media professionals who created and distributed “memes” and left pro-Russian comments on platforms like Facebook and YouTube. Copy writers would lift existing news articles, remove facts detrimental to Russian narratives, cite Ukrainian blogs as sources (often written by the Agency’s bloggers), and republish the resultant story on pseudo-journalistic websites in both Russian and Ukrainian. These websites would have a .ua domain, creating the impression that the news was reported by Ukrainians, for Ukrainians. The articles were not devoid of verifiable facts, but through the selection or omission of certain facts the articles obfuscated the truth to promote a narrative of Ukrainian aggression and barbarism against Russian victims. Bloggers and social media trolls would then reference these articles in blog posts and social media comments, creating a feedback loop of Russian narrative manipulation (Adler & McEwen, 2018).

Traditional Russian media outlets pushed accounts of the Maidan demonstrations designed to exploit tensions between the Ukrainian speaking population in western Ukraine and the Russian speaking population in eastern Ukraine. Russian language television promoted false reports that the Maidan protesters were affiliated with fascist organizations, that Russian speakers were being assaulted by Ukrainian mobs, and that refugees were pouring over the Russian border to flee from Ukrainian oppression. In eastern Ukraine, Russian speakers created self-defense squads to protect themselves from these phantom threats. Having successfully annexed Crimea in March 2014 with little Western response, Russia stepped up its support of separatist forces in the Donbass via humanitarian convoys. Residents of the Donbass began to associate the arrival of Russian television crews and journalists with the outbreak of fighting and artillery barrages. It was as if “this war is being fought mainly so that someone else can watch it on television,” (Warner & Smith, 2017). Russian journalists seemingly knew exactly where to be and when to arrive in order to capture the war on film. This uncanny prescience is more likely evidence of close coordination between the Russian military and media, combining their efforts to maximize the results. By broadcasting images of war and strife, Russia bolstered its claims that peace keepers and humanitarian assistance was required.

Key Takeaways: Containing NATO by Protecting Russian Compatriots

In Moldova, the Kremlin left soldiers from the Soviet era in place under the guise of peacekeeping. Russia exploited linguistic differences to perpetuate a frozen conflict and prevent Moldova from progressing toward NATO members. Georgia’s NATO aspirations provoked overt Russian military action. Moscow unveiled the full spectrum of hybrid warfare, coupling information dominance, cyber warfare, and military action to protect its carefully cultivated population of Russian compatriots. The Russo-Georgian war changed the borders of a sovereign state and began a political process to gradually annex territory into the Russian Federation. Emboldened by NATO inaction in response to Georgia, Russia pursued a more aggressive campaign in response to pro-Western demonstrations in Ukraine. The Russian military was used to depose a democratically elected legislature and annex territory in Crimea. Kremlin support for Russian separatists has continued unabated during a four-year

lessons learned from the Ukrainian campaign to political campaigns in the West such as the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom and the 2016 United States Presidential election (Adler & McEwen, 2018).

war. As in Georgia, NATO reactions have been characterized by rhetoric, not action, even when Russian hardware was used to shoot down a civilian airliner and kill over two hundred NATO citizens.

Russian interventions in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine demonstrate how Russia's sustained cultural, economic, and propaganda campaigns lay the groundwork for more coercive interventions in sovereign states. Operating with patience and clear strategic commitment to prevent NATO expansion, Russia has cultivated compatriot populations abroad, used media to estrange them from their governments, and used military force to secure Russian geopolitical goals. Russia has effectively turned the doctrine of containment on its head, punishing states for Western inclinations and clawing back territory in the post-Soviet space.

Why Narva? The Geopolitical Significance of an Altogether Insignificant Place

Thus far, the Russian push to claw back territory in the post-Soviet space has been limited to interventions in unaffiliated countries guilty of expressing Western leanings. These states on the Russian frontier have been brought to heel through hybrid campaigns and clear messages have been sent throughout the region. Since the Russo-Georgian war, several Balkan states with existing NATO aspirations have joined the alliance, but only Bosnia and Herzegovina has accepted a Membership Action Plan.⁶ Substantive NATO expansion has been halted and Western preferences on the Russian frontier have been punished. Military force, among other forms of coercion, has been used to accomplish these ends. At no point has NATO checked Russian aggression with force. Russia has effectively communicated that it is dangerous to pursue Western institutions and alliances.⁷ The next step is to demonstrate that it is similarly dangerous to trust Western institutions and alliances to back up their security guarantees with action.

Moving north from Ukraine, Belarus provides a buffer between the West and Russia. In fact, the Russian Federation only shares a border with NATO member states in the Baltic region. Estonia and Latvia border Russia proper while Lithuania surrounds the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. While Russia could seek to lay bare the emptiness of Western security guarantees in any of these countries, Estonia offers a particularly enticing target for Russian revisionism.

As previously outlined, Estonia and Russia have a history of animus and lack a ratified border treaty. Just as in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, there is a substantial population of disaffected Russian compatriots who are geographically concentrated in the capital of Tallinn and the border county of Ida-Viru. Russian media dominates in the region while the Orthodox faith solidifies culture ties to Moscow. Passport distribution has helped transform these Russian compatriots into credentialed Russian citizens. Estonia has made significant strides toward energy independence, but it is still completely dependent on

⁶ Albania and Croatia were incorporated in NATO's sixth enlargement on April 1, 2009 and Montenegro joined on June 5, 2017 in the seventh and most recent enlargement. (NATO, n.d.) The Membership Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina is inactive until the nation resolves the issue of subnational control of military property and hardware (NATO, 2017).

⁷ While not the focus of this paper, it is worth noting that Russia has provided military hardware, troops, economic assistance, and staunch diplomatic cover to the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Despite intense Western rhetoric, sanctions, and occasional military action against the regime, Putin's unwavering support has enabled Assad to maintain power. By contrasting Russian support in Syria to Western inaction in Ukraine, which occurred concurrently, Russia has cast itself to be a steadfast friend while the West has confined itself to rhetorical support while largely abandoning the aspirations of the Maidan demonstrators.

Russia for natural gas. Moreover, the shale oil field that allows for a high degree of Estonian energy independence is largely located in Ida-Viru. The projection of cultural soft power, consular efforts, economic leverage, and information warfare are all facts of life in Estonia.

The 2007 Bronze soldier debate presaged hybrid campaigns elsewhere. Cashing in on years of cultural influence, consular policies, and information warfare, the Kremlin mobilized its compatriots to protest violently, halted oil shipments, and engaged in hybrid warfare against the Estonian state. Thus far, Estonia has been spared the arrival of Russian peace keepers to facilitate the annexation of territory, but after Georgia and Ukraine such fears no longer seem unfounded. Those fears are focused into a collective nightmare for NATO in the small border town of Narva.

Narva is the largest city in the economically depressed and culturally estranged eastern county of Ida-Viru. Only one third of the county's population is Estonian. Russian is the primary language of instruction in 53 percent of schools compared to 15 percent nationally. Compared with the rest of the nation, residents of Ida-Viru are nearly three times as likely to live in some degree of poverty, with 42 percent of Ida-Viru experiencing material deprivation compared to 16 percent nationally. This is in part due to differential employment rates between Russian and Estonian speakers. While only 4.4 percent of Estonian speakers are unemployed, 8.9 percent of Russian speakers cannot find work (Statistics Estonia). These effects are magnified in Narva. Of Narva's 58,000 residents, half are Russian citizens and 97 percent speak Russian as their first language (Sander, 2014).

These disparities manifest themselves in electoral outcomes. In Estonia's multiparty system, the pro-Russian Center Party has been ostracized from coalition governance because of links to Vladimir Putin's United Russia party (MacKinnon, 2015). Nevertheless, in the 2017 local elections the Center Party received 27.3 percent of the vote, a plurality of all votes cast nationally. By comparison, the pro-EU Reform party only managed to win 19.5 of all votes cast. In Ida-Viru, the Center Party took 52.9 percent of the vote and in Narva there was even greater support, with 66.8 percent of voters backing the pro-Russian party (Valimised Eesti-Estonian Elections, 2017). Additionally, turnout in Ida-Viru was approximately five percent lower than the rest of the country. While this could be indicative of lower political engagement, it is also influenced by citizenship policies tied to linguistic proficiency in Estonian. Since Russian is the mother tongue of the substantial majority of Ida-Viru residents, it is probable that the Center Party's vote totals do not capture the full degree of the party's support in the region.

It is important to acknowledge that while these results are from the most recent elections in Estonia, these elections determined the composition of local councils, not the Riigikogu (national legislature). In the most recent Riigikogu elections, held in 2015, the Reform party won the plurality with 27.7 percent of the vote, besting the Center Party's result of 24.8 percent (Valimised Eesti-Estonian Elections, 2015). While the Center Party has yet to win a plurality in the Riigikogu and has been excluded from coalition governance, unlike other national parties, the Center Party enjoys relatively consistent performance between local and national elections. In contrast, parties like the Reform Party or the Social Democratic Party see their electoral share wane in local elections in favor of local coalition lists. Also, while the other major parties saw their 2015 vote share decrease from the 2011 cycle, the

Center Party improved its result. These facts demonstrate strong and growing allegiance to a party that advocates for Tallinn to take its cues from the Kremlin for its political, economic, and security future.⁸

Narva sits on the western bank of the Narva river, opposite the medieval Russian fortress of Ivangorod. It's culture, language, media, and politics are decidedly oriented toward Moscow. Not only does it currently elect pro-Russian political officials; it has already sought to break from Estonia once before. In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, Narva voted for Estonian independence in 1990, but by 1993 sought to break from Tallinn. Frustrated by language and citizenship laws, Narva held a referendum for autonomy. Despite only generating 50 percent turnout, the referendum prevailed with 97 percent of the vote (Effron, 1993). The Estonian courts and the Riigikogu rejected the result of Narva's bid for autonomy as unconstitutional and Narva remained fully subject to Estonian law.

The Narva Dilemma: A Hypothetical Sketch of a Russian Intervention on NATO territory

The combination of geography, a large Russian compatriot population, political and cultural estrangement, economic stagnation, and Russian dominance in the information space make Narva a prime candidate to expand the Russian imperial project into NATO territory. The risk of such an intervention is encapsulated in what Russian political scientist Andrei Piontkovsky calls the "Narva Dilemma". Piontkovsky offers a bleak view of Russian revanchist tactics under Vladimir Putin. Citing the incorporation of limited nuclear strikes within Russian military doctrine, Piontkovsky proposes the potential for a Russian invasion of eastern Estonia that covers inadequacies in Russia's conventional forces with the credible threat of limited nuclear war should NATO seek to expel Russian troops. While Piontkovsky's hypothetical may well be far-fetched, the central contention is that Russia seeks to force Western leaders to confront the idea of being willing to die for Estonia, and more specifically, Narva (Piontkovsky, 2015). Even if Piontkovsky's dire prophecy of a large-scale Russia invasion backed by the threat of nuclear weapons is likely hyperbolic, the underlying concept of the Narvan dilemma remains relevant. Russia could pursue myriad paths to crack the Western political and security institutions without taking such a provocative measure.

While Russia had no hand in the 1993 autonomy referendum in Narva, it is not difficult to imagine Moscow supporting a similar effort in the current environment. Referendums in Ukraine, whether for joining the Russian Federation in Crimea, or for an ambiguous form of autonomy in Donetsk and Luhansk, illustrate how Russia has recently used the democratic process to provide rhetorical justification for foreign interventions. Of the two paths, the autonomy pursued in the Donbass seems more likely for Narva. Russia pursued unification in Crimea in no small part to secure control of Sevastopol, a critical strategic port, before moving more broadly to end Kiev's EU and NATO aspirations. The greater strategic benefit offered by Sevastopol justified the increased risk of international reaction stemming from annexation. Narva offers no such tangible benefit to Russia. Rather, the Kremlin's interest in Narva lies in cleaving it from NATO, not from incorporating into the Russian Federation.

Over the course of two and a half decades Russia has developed a staunch base of compatriots in Estonia generally and Narva in particular. Dominance in the information space allows the Kremlin an

⁸ Recognizing the potential for discontent in Narva to metastasize, Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid announced her intention to relocate her office to Narva for one month every fall in order to communicate solidarity with the citizens of Narva. Additionally, she is supporting Narva to be the Capital of Culture for Europe in 2024. After volunteering that Narva is "not a depressing place" she acknowledged that there is much work to be done before Narva can earn such an honor, even such a temporary one (Cavegn, 2018).

avenue to weaponize its Estonian compatriot base at a time of its choosing, whether through protests as was demonstrated with the Bronze Soldier fiasco in 2007, or at the ballot box by pursuing another autonomy referendum in Narva. Were such a vote to happen it would not be a surprise if the measure carried. A range of diplomatic tools would be immediately available to Moscow, including recognition of Narvan sovereignty and a redrawn border treaty that reflected such sovereignty delivered to Estonian officials in Tallinn. The deployment of peace keeping forces would logically follow, presumably at the explicit invitation of the fledgling Narvan government. Restoring Estonian sovereignty would then require military action by NATO member states. Failure to do so would sacrifice Estonian territory and lay bare the emptiness of NATO's Article 5 promise to provide for the common defense. However, keeping that promise would require attacking Russian troops, risking a much broader and more destructive war.

NATO member states have a population of just over 600 million people while Narva numbers just shy of 60,000. In cleaving Narva from NATO, whether by supporting autonomy, by annexation, or by any means in between, Putin would be betting that the West is not going to risk broader war with Russia for the sake of a small town of Russian speakers in a remote corner of Europe that accounts for less than a hundredth of one percent of the NATO population. Western leaders are thus put on the horns of the unenviable dilemma: risk war with a revisionist nuclear power or watch meekly as the cornerstone of NATO erodes into rubble.

The Western Response: From Regulatory Regimes to Token Troop Deployments

Faced with such an unpalatable choice, Western leaders have sought to avoid this dilemma altogether. To shore up Baltic energy vulnerabilities, the European Commission has sought to limit Russian energy leverage through the combination of regulation and infrastructure development included in the Baltic Energy Market Integration Plan (BEMIP). These reforms, coupled with the emergence of new suppliers in the market, have ended Russia's monopolistic advantage, but not Russia's dominant market share. The annexation of Crimea produced harsh criticism and increased sanctions on the Russia, and slowly, the supply of military hardware to the beleaguered Ukrainian military. Finally, wary of similar fiascos within Europe, the major NATO military powers have deployed a small number of military personnel to each of the Baltic states to reassure their host governments and raise the stakes for Russian intervention.

Economic Security: Regulation and Infrastructure

Europe consumes large amounts of energy and lacks large domestic sources of hydrocarbons. Political movements against nuclear energy and commitments to cleaner forms of energy have reduced the viability of lignite coal and nuclear power plants, once staples of the European energy mix. A mix of natural gas and renewable energy is filling that void. By switching from indigenous fuels to imported fuels, Europe exacerbated an already precarious position by increasing its dependence on energy imports from a small group of suppliers. Russia is the leading supplier of energy to Europe in every category of hydrocarbon fuel accounting for 25.8 percent of solid fuels, 27.7 percent of crude oil, and 29.4 percent of natural gas in 2015. Also, while total energy dependency was relatively stable at just over 50 percent during the decade from 2005-2015, European dependence for natural gas grew from 57 percent to 70 percent in the same time (Eurostat, 2017). Furthermore, eight European nations rely on Russia for virtually all of their natural gas, including all of the Baltic states. The increased reliance on

Russian natural gas during the 2005-2015 timeframe also saw Russia act militarily beyond its borders for the first time in the post-Soviet era.

While the peril of high reliance on Russian energy is obvious, alternative sources of supply are not so apparent. Accordingly, Europe sought to leverage its status as the largest market for exported Russian energy, especially given that energy exports account for 20 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 37 percent of the government budget of the Russian Federation (Shaffer, 2009). As much as Europe needed Russian energy, Russia needed European money. This allowed European regulators to seek to reduce the Kremlin's leverage over individual states by making regulatory compliance conditional for market entry. These reforms have been rolled out in a series of rules, policy documents, and regulations over the course of two decades, the most notable being the 2009 Third Energy Package. The overarching strategy of this regulatory regime is to transform Europe from 28 national energy markets, each limited in their sources of supply by their particular geographic and political circumstance, to a single internal market. To this end, Europe has sought to diversify supply, eliminate restrictions on third party sales of imported energy, update pipeline infrastructure to allow for reverse flows during crisis, and link regional energy systems together (Costescu, Manitsas, & Szikszai, 2018, pp. 4-8). Additionally, Europe has committed to reducing its fossil fuel usage through the 2020 Climate and Energy Package which seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent from 1990, increase energy efficiency by 20 percent, and use 20 percent renewable energy, all by 2020 (European Commission, 2012).

These initiatives are extremely important to the Baltic states. Increased efficiency and reduced demand result in reduced vulnerability to Russian manipulation. The Baltic States are exceeding the 2020 standards for renewables,⁹ primarily deriving from hydroelectric plants (European Commission, 2018). Unfortunately, renewables blunt, but do not eliminate the need for Russian gas, especially with regard to residential heating. As previously outlined, the Baltic region is effectively an energy island and would benefit greatly from interconnection with a broader European market, both in economic and security terms. To this end, the Baltic states, in conjunction with their Nordic and European partners, have pursued a series of infrastructure projects commonly referred to as BEMIP. The first of these, Estlink, is a high voltage undersea cable system running from Finland to Estonia that connects the Nordic and Baltic power grids. A similar cable, Nordbalt, runs from Sweden to Lithuania. Addressing the natural gas network, Europe is pursuing Baltic Connector, a seabed natural gas pipeline between Finland and Estonia scheduled for completion in 2020 (European Commission, 2018). To connect the Baltic gas network to Europe, the European Union is constructing the Gas Interconnection Lithuania-Poland (GIPL) with a scheduled completion date in 2021 (European Commission, 2016). Additionally, the new Klaipėda LNG floating storage and regasification facility, opened in 2014, allows Lithuania to receive maritime shipments of natural gas. LNG imports allow the Baltic states to import gas from its American allies, recently flush with shale gas. While this LNG trade requires higher prices to be feasible, expensive American gas is superior to no Russian gas, especially during Baltic winters.

The Third Energy Package also mandated the dismantling of singular control on the supply, transport, and delivery of energy imports. In the gas sector, Gazprom was the primary target of these

⁹ To meet standards, member states must supply 20 percent of gross energy consumption from renewable sources by 2020. In 2016, renewables accounted for 28.8 percent of Estonian energy, 37.2 percent of Latvian energy, and 25.6% of Lithuanian energy.

rules which were implemented to reduce the possibility for monopolistic advantage and exploitative business practices. In the Baltics, this disaggregation of power was accomplished by the nationalization of the Baltic natural gas companies.¹⁰ While Gazprom still supplies the Baltic States with their gas, it lacks the ability to exercise singular control over the market. The introduction of LNG from Klaipėda and eventually gas from the Baltic Connector will further reduce Gazprom's leverage, forcing it to compete with other suppliers in the Baltic market for the first time. Martin Jirušek and Petra Kuchyňková analyzed Gazprom's business practices in the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Moldova, and Belarus to assess to what degree Gazprom acts as an instrument of Russian foreign policy. They found that generally Gazprom is motivated by business considerations, not political ones, when it is forced to do so by market conditions and regulatory regimes. Diversity of supply was the most important factor in reigning in Gazprom's monopolistic and coercive tendencies (Jirusek & Kuchynkova, 2018). Based on their findings, similar behavior can reasonably be expected in the Baltic market moving forward.

The fundamental threat to Russia posed by BEMIP and the EU's regulatory effort is not that these efforts decrease Russian leverage in the Baltic region (though they do), but rather that the connection of the Baltic energy infrastructure to the rest of Europe is part of a broader trend leading to a single European energy market. Such a market eliminates Russia's ability to selectively reward and punish its near-abroad states without impacting their deliveries to the major European powers. In the process Russia loses an important tool for applying political pressure to its neighbors. While the protection of the Baltic and European energy markets from Russian manipulation is important, decreasing Russia's energy leverage does not change Russian interests in the Baltics as the Baltics provide a relatively small share of Russian gas revenues which will not suddenly vanish overnight. Rather, with Gazprom neutered, Russia is forced to look to other means, including more coercive methods, to accomplish their political objectives in the Baltics.

Protecting the Baltic Flank: Small Units Face Big Risks

The Baltic states lack significant military forces on their own. While they have increased defense spending to meet their annual defense expenditures commitments and have consistently deployed troops to support the NATO mission in Afghanistan, collectively the Baltic states only muster approximately 25,000 regular troops.¹¹ These troops serve primarily in light infantry units as the Baltics lack a significant aviation, naval, or armored capability. Wartime doctrines in each nation incorporate significant mobilization of the population via reserve call-ups and citizen militias. However, these forces do not pose a significant deterrent threat to Russia, should it wish to pursue military operations in the Baltic. Simply put, the Baltic states contribute territory to the alliance, but cannot provide for the defense of that territory. By accepting the Baltic States into the alliance, NATO assumed the

¹⁰ Russian critics contend that these regulatory and infrastructure projects are not an attempt to make a more secure and open Baltic market, but rather are a corrupt effort to nationalize Gazprom property in order for Baltic governments to profit from the energy trade (Gaponenko, 2018). The Russian view that the BEMIP's component projects all seek to supplant Russia are valid, but the critique that such initiatives are born out of a kleptocratic impetus of Baltic governments is ironic given the business ethics and transparency that characterizes Russian business practices and statecraft.

¹¹ The average size of the Estonian Regular Armed Forces in peacetime is about 6,000 personnel, of whom half are conscripts. The Estonian Voluntary Defence League, a civilian militia incorporated into the defense structure, adds 15,000 men at arms. In wartime reserve callups would swell the force to 60,000 personnel, with 21,000 in a high readiness reserve (Estonian Defence Forces, n.d.). Latvia and Lithuania have similar force structures, but do not publish strength estimates on their government websites.

responsibility to aid these small nations should they ever be attacked, effectively requiring the alliance to provide for their defense even in peacetime.

Recognizing that deterring Russian territorial aggression in the region is more palatable and less risky than the prospect of reversing Russian gains, Western leaders have deployed small forces to each Baltic state to reassure their host governments and dissuade Russian aggression. These forces, called Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) deployments, amount to approximately 1,000 personnel in each country with limited armored and air power capability. Additionally, the United States is rotating an armored brigade through the region for the bulk of the calendar, adding a more significant conventional deterrent force. These forces form working relationships with the host nation militaries and play an important role in the planning and execution of military exercises in the Baltics and nearby Poland. Incorporating the limited military resources of the host nations, including their reserve and militia forces, into NATO operational planning for contingencies maximizes the utility of the host nation forces and magnifies the strength of the EFP forces (McNamara, 2016). While these benefits are real, the main purpose of the EFP deployments is to provide a trip wire that will ensure the support of the major NATO powers in the event of Russian aggression. Russia may well be right that politicians in the United Kingdom and the United States may be hesitant to risk war to defend Baltic soil. However, the prospect of having to kill American and British soldiers in order to pursue an intervention in the Baltics is intended to virtually guarantee the retaliation of major NATO members. Accordingly, the primary intention of these small deployments is to raise the cost for Russian military adventurism in the Baltics to a prohibitively high level.

Turning to Estonia specifically, NATO deployed a British light armored battalion consisting of 800 troops with armored fighting vehicles and tanks to Tapa Air Base. Denmark added a 200-strong infantry company and Iceland offered a Coast Guard officer for planning and coordination, bringing the total EFP strength to 1,001 troops, roughly one light armored battalion (NATO, 2018). Additionally, small detachments of fighter aircraft from NATO member states rotate through Tapa. Located approximately 70 kilometers southeast of Tallinn and 140 kilometers west of Narva, forces from Tapa are in position to fight a delaying action in the defense of Tallinn but are over two hours away from the Russian border in the event of a sudden border incursion.

On the other side of the border sits the Russian Western Military District, consisting of 22 maneuver battalions, 4 of which are heavy armor, 10 artillery battalions, 6 attack helicopter battalions, 26 fixed wing tactical squadrons, and a wide array of surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles at its disposal (Shlapak & Johnson, 2016, pp. 5-6). Due to this massive force disparity, in a hypothetical conventional conflict the EFP deployment to Tapa is less a trip wire and more akin a soda can on a train track. Moreover, in the event of such a conflict, NATO forces would almost certainly be denied air superiority as any NATO airborne response would be forced to contend with the robust Integrated Air Defense System in Kaliningrad, greatly complicating any efforts for land-based aircraft forced to run the gap between Kaliningrad and Belarus. While American carrier-based airpower may have easier access to the airspace, in no way would American flyers enjoy a permissive environment with regard to surface-to-air missile threats and would likely be outnumbered by Russian fighter aircraft (Shlapak & Johnson, 2016, p. 4). Moreover, the presence of a carrier in the North Sea during the initial days of the attack is by no means assured and would represent a deviation from the typical pattern of American carrier deployments.

In 2016, the RAND corporation war gamed a conventional Russian campaign against the Baltics. The war game scenario consisted of multiple rounds and offered a free hand to players consisting of both uniformed military personnel and civilian defense professionals. The players, who rotated sides between rounds, were limited to the NATO forces available in the European theater with one week of warning and the Russian forces typically available in the Western Military District and the Kaliningrad oblast. Game after game ended in a rout, with Russian forces arriving at the gates of Riga and Tallinn in 36 to 60 hours. The most effective NATO responses involved delaying actions in urban terrain that would have a devastating effect on the civilian population and infrastructure. The Rand study portends a world where Russian tanks would sit in Baltic capitals while Western leaders would be forced to grapple with the cost and risk of reversing the Russian *fait accompli*. A successful campaign to wrest back control of lost territory would be unlikely to remain conventional, as it would require striking air defense and surface-to-surface missile batteries inside Russia proper. While Western leaders are shy to talk about nuclear weapons in practical terms, Russian doctrine has always incorporated them into theater and operational level planning. The Rand study puts the dilemma bluntly: after such a *fait accompli* "it may seem highly unlikely to Moscow that the United States would be willing to exchange New York for Riga," (Shlapak & Johnson, 2016, pp. 1-7).

Essentially the war game authors agree with the general premise of the EFP deployments, but not the scope. In this light, the current deployments of small forces with limited firepower, armor, and aircover do not pose a credible deterrent to Russia. Worse still, the extremely limited nature of the EFP capability may reinforce Russian doubts about Western resolve in the face of a crisis. Effective deterrence would require a larger force capable of fighting an effective delaying action to prevent Russian forces from establishing complete control before a more robust NATO response could be managed. In other words, trade the trip wire for a speed bump (Clark, Luik, Ramms, & Shirreff, 2016, p. 6). The RAND study contends that a larger force consisting of seven brigades, including three heavy armored brigades, reinforced by adequate air power and surface fires would provide an effective conventional deterrent. While this footprint would represent a five-fold increase in troops stationed in the Baltics and cost an estimated \$2.7 billion, it is a miniscule cost compared to the options left on the table after a Russian attack (Shlapak & Johnson, 2016, pp. 1-2).

Increasing NATO's Baltic presence carries with it economic, political, and diplomatic costs that Western leaders appear unwilling to shoulder. Western leaders invoke the importance of honoring the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997, which limits the deployment of conventional forces to certain areas of Europe (Rynning & Ringsmose, 2016, p. 2). Unfortunately, taking a principled stand on the importance of honoring force structure agreements when the other party is massing troops at the NATO border reeks of naiveté. It is unreasonable to hope that Russia will honor rules that the West is not willing to enforce. Put more glibly, "there are currently fewer US Army soldiers in Europe than policemen in New York City, and the total of 65,000 US military and civilian personnel stationed in Europe must do a job which, during the Cold War, was assigned to a force almost ten times as large," (Clark, Luik, Ramms, & Shirreff, 2016, pp. 15-16).

Credibility and Force Size in Deterrence

The arguments in favor of larger forces in the Baltics are compelling from a strictly operational sense. A small increase in the NATO posture in the Baltics, relative to the overall force structure and economy of the alliance, would return significantly better results in conventional campaigns. Indeed, such an approach is prudent and should be pursued. However, the recognition that a greater sized force

is necessary seems to flow primarily from an admission that faced with a Russian invasion, Western leaders would not be as rock-ribbed as their rhetoric might suggest. Moreover, it assumes that Russia would gain significantly from taking Baltic territory.

It is important to keep in mind that the foundational strategic objective for Russia is to push back against NATO expansion. However unbalanced the Baltic order of battle may be for Russia, the global order of battle tilts decidedly toward NATO. Testing NATO resolve is not a risk-free strategy for Russia, and its hedge against a lopsided conventional war rests on an apocalyptic nuclear exchange. Clashes with NATO in the past have not provoked a significant Russian response. In 2015, Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet that repeatedly violated its airspace (BBC News, 2015). In 2017, a U.S. Navy fighter jet shot down a Syrian jet despite the strong Russian presence in Syria.¹² The United States struck Syrian bases in response to chemical attacks, first in 2017 and then, with the assistance of France and the United Kingdom in 2018 (BBC News, 2018). In February 2018 battle, Russian mercenaries operating in Syria took heavy casualties at the hands of American forces (Lockie, 2018). Despite harsh Russian rhetoric, these incidents did not ignite the latent Russian powder keg.

Russia may not be as willing to risk a direct confrontation with NATO as the bleaker scenarios offered in the RAND study suggest. Russian political scientist Andrei Piontkovsky contends that NATO membership coupled with the token EFP deployments to the Baltics has turned the dilemma on its head; forcing the Kremlin to ponder what consequences they are willing to risk for Baltic territory (Piontkovsky, 2015, pp. 12-13). While Russian belligerence may be overstated, their interest in the Baltics are increased by NATO's presence, not diminished. Russia's interest lies in removing Baltic territory from the alliance, not from annexing it. The annexation of Crimea secured a strategic port and was far afield from Europe proper. While the annexation of Estonia and Latvia would reunite Kaliningrad with the motherland, such action in the middle of Europe is unlikely to go unchecked. An unaffiliated Estonia and Latvia would restore a buffer, removing NATO troops from Russian borders. To the extent that the Kremlin could accomplish this end militarily without provoking a NATO response, it would also have the added benefit of exposing Article 5 to be a sham.

Back to Narva: An exemplar case of a broader hybrid threat on the Baltic frontier

This brings us back to Narva. While a Russian hybrid intervention could occur anywhere along the Baltic frontier, Narva offers an exemplar case for four reasons. First, Estonia lacks a ratified border territory with the Russian Federation. This removes a rhetorical barrier to Russian intervention by allowing the Kremlin to frame any action as simply a symptom of an ongoing border debate between two sovereign nations. Second, Narva is home to a large and disaffected compatriot population that is estranged from broader Estonian society. All recent Russian interventions use compatriot populations as both a rhetorical justification for Russian military intervention and a source or civil unrest to destabilize the local government. Third, Narva has previously voted for autonomy before, adding a sense of history and legitimacy to any subsequent effort. Whether it is the annexation referendum in Crimea or the autonomy referendums in the Donbass, recent history suggests that referendums have been incorporated into Russian intervention doctrine. Fourth, and most important, Narva maximizes the tyranny of distance for NATO by virtue of its position at the extreme corner of the alliance. While Narva is but a short walk across a bridge for Russian peace keepers, the nearest multinational NATO

¹² U.S. Navy F/A-18E pilot LCDR Mike "MOB" Tremel downed a Syrian Su-22 on June 18, 2017 over eastern Syria, marking the first air-to-air kill for the United States Navy since the Persian Gulf War (Brown, 2018).

force sits hours away in Tapa and in the event that the crisis escalates, the nearest NATO armor sits days away in Poland. While NATO theoretically could harden Narva with the existing EFP forces, with such limited forces throughout the region, focusing on Narva would leave vulnerabilities elsewhere. This underscores the inadequacy of the current NATO posture.

I am far from the first observer to cast a nervous gaze toward Narva as its proximity and demographics draw obvious parallels to Russian adventurism in Georgia and Ukraine. While these parallels may be obvious, critics suggest they are also overly simplistic. Objections to the Narva thesis fall generally into two camps. The first essentially reverses the Narva dilemma and argues that Narva offers Russia nothing of substance, and accordingly the Kremlin would not accept the risk, however remote, of an aggressive response from the West. The second dismisses the risk by citing a lack of popular support for separatism in Narva itself.

Emblematic of the first objection, Piontkovsky argues that the deployment of the EFP forces, specifically those from major, traditional NATO powers, shifts the dilemma 180 degrees by guaranteeing that Moscow would provoke a Western response if it tried to conduct an intervention on NATO soil (Piontkovsky, 2015, p. 13). Certainly, if Russian forces attacked the predominantly British garrison in Tapa such a response is highly probable, but such an assault is not particularly likely because that sort of provocation is precisely something the Kremlin would prefer to avoid. Instead, if Russia can take territory inside Estonia without killing NATO soldiers, the onus will remain on the West to summon the will to expel Russia from NATO lands.

The second objection focuses on the citizens of Narva itself, observing that while they may be sympathetic to Russia, they do not want to trade the prosperity and security in the West to live under Russian world. Russians living in Narva have family in Russia and travel to and from Russia, seeing first hand for themselves the disparity in economic prosperity between east and west. In this view, potholes in Ivangorord provide the most robust insurance policy against separatism in Narva. While this objection is factually correct, it is insufficient to alleviate the threat of Russian intervention. In interviews with compatriots from Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, Grigas found that it was wholly irrelevant whether a group of Russian compatriots identified as such or even sought the assistance of Russia in any unified way (Grigas, 2016). Instead, it is far more important that a particular population serves a broader strategic purpose for the Kremlin. Self-determination may be the rhetorical justification for a military intervention, but it is not a causal factor.

On the other hand, there is sufficient evidence to foreshadow a hybrid intervention in Narva. To start, Russian forces are well positioned to conduct operations in the border region with limited notice. Additionally, Narva offers clear, albeit limited, benefits to Moscow, but not to Brussels or Washington. Moreover, Russia could threaten the core promise of NATO without the risk and cost of a more traditional military campaign. Russian forces already conduct exercises on the border, relishing in their provocative effect on their small neighbors.¹³ In fact, the deployment of Russian military forces to

¹³ “The number of major exercises conducted by NATO fully encompassing the land, sea and air power of its Allies in the Baltic Sea region should be increased. With Russia conducting “snap” military exercises numbering 30,000-80,000 troops proximate to Baltic borders since the onset of the Ukraine crisis, the previous NATO exercises that have taken place in the region, such as the 6,000 strong Steadfast Jazz in November 2013, now seem rather modest. Larger exercises would serve to demonstrate NATO’s credible commitment to deter one of the core

Estonia is the only part of the spectrum of Russia's re-imperialization tactics that Tallinn has yet to experience. During the Bronze Soldier incident in 2007, Russia conducted a hybrid campaign which used Russian media sources to push Kremlin narratives, activating the protest potential of its disaffected compatriots in Tallinn. They coupled these riots with cyber warfare designed to cripple effective governance and punished Estonia economically by cutting off energy shipments. In this sense, Estonia was perhaps a dress rehearsal for Georgia, which in turn laid the groundwork for Crimea and the Donbass in Ukraine. It is not a stretch to think the Russian campaign to restore its Russian empire would return full circle to Estonia and complete the spectrum of hybrid war.

Separating Narva from Estonia would yield three very important benefits for Moscow. First, Russian control of Narva, whether directly or by proxy, would imperil the shale fields in Ida-Viru. Estonia's relative high degree of energy independence relies on shale oil. By threatening that oil field, the Kremlin regains some of the energy leverage it lost when Gazprom was neutered by the Third Energy Package. Second, after nearly two decades of increasingly unpopular wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East, it forces NATO to commit significant resources to the Baltics. Such a move is unlikely to sit well with war-weary citizens in NATO's largest and most strategically significant countries. And finally, and most important, it shakes the confidence throughout the rest of the alliance that NATO can or will defend the territory of smaller states. By intervening no more than ten kilometers on the other side of the NATO border Russia can shake NATO to its core.

Accordingly, Narva offers Putin the golden opportunity to test NATO's commitment to Article 5. A conventional invasion targeted at Riga and Tallinn forces Russia to commit to the field of battle, come what may. Such a campaign is almost guaranteed to provoke a response. While Russia might win such a campaign, it would damage NATO even more if it could take territory without the West summoning the courage to fight. Moreover, by pursuing a hybrid campaign against Narva, if at any point the NATO response is greater than the Kremlin anticipates, Russia can simply withdraw without losing face. Narva is primed for such a hybrid campaign. Russian media is already the trusted source for Estonia's Russian speakers, especially in Narva. They view Putin favorably and are sympathetic to the Russian narratives about Crimea and the Donbass. With the right prodding in the Russian media, existing linguistic, ethnic, and citizenship fault lines could be weaponized. Whether justified by rioting or a potential referendum, Russian peacekeepers could be in Narva to defend their Russian compatriots before the NATO forces in Tapa could get start their vehicles.

Commenting on just such a scenario in 2017 General Sir Richard Barrons, a 36-year veteran of the British Army and former Joint Forces commander from 2013 to 2016, observed, "There are very sophisticated Russian armed forces within easy reach of Narva...it's very easy to just send ground forces and...you've locked down the airspace. You've basically broken Article 5 and [said] 'come on if you're hard enough'. At which point the NATO alliance, which [has] no plan for this and [has] no resources ready to deal with it would have to mobilize...and fight their way back into the Baltic sphere," (Miller, 2017). The General gets to the heart of the matter: NATO's lack of preparation for a Narva-like scenario is only outstripped by its lack of credibility to defend the territorial integrity of the Baltic States.

aspects in Russia's application of "hybrid" warfare, namely the use of the presence of large-scale conventional forces close to the border of the target state as coercion," (McNamara, 2016).

Consequently, while analysts at RAND and other similar think tanks are correct that NATO nations need to field an adequate deterrent in the Baltics, they also need to be clear eyed and resolute in order to make that deterrent credible. NATO, by its very nature, is deliberative in a way that Russia is not. Consensus among NATO members is not always easy to achieve. Its forces operate under a variety of national caveats, limiting the nature in which the armed forces of certain nations can be employed. Different sensibilities, force structures, and national laws lead to different rules of engagement, complicating coordination in even the most deliberate of operations (Zapfe, 2016). Accordingly, NATO is ill-equipped to respond to the fluid and multimodal nature of hybrid warfare.

Were Russia to move against a town like Narva, it would almost certainly not be a clear-cut case of military aggression. The lines between civil unrest, criminal activity, and foreign intervention would be blurred. While it is all well and good to plan to shoot the first “little green man” to appear, as the Estonian defense chief General Terres famously said, the precise dilemma posed by paramilitary personnel that lack insignia is that it is extremely difficult to distinguish between domestic rabble rouser and foreign invader (Jones, 2015). While such distinctions matter little within the Russian hybrid warfare doctrine, whether an attack is foreign or domestic matters a great deal when weighing a response under Article 5, especially to European leaders who are hesitant to ramp up the defense of the Baltics. By the time “little green men” are crossing the bridge to Narva, it will be too late to hash out a coherent and unified response.

Whether the Russian menace to the Baltics manifests itself in a combined arms assault tearing across the Baltic countryside or a hybrid campaign against a small Russian town that happens to sit on the Estonian side of the border, it is abundantly apparent that at present, NATO is neither materially or psychologically ready to face either scenario. Whatever regrets European leaders may have about inviting the Baltic states into the alliance are wholly irrelevant to the fact that Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are indeed NATO members today. As such, they rightfully expect the protection they are entitled to under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. Western leaders need to abandon the practically insignificant quest for the moral high ground by unilaterally maintaining their obligations under the Russian-NATO Founding Act of 1997 and respond pragmatically. NATO must field a permanent, robust force in the region so that it can provide a meaningful deterrent to a conventional invasion. And even more important, NATO must eliminate the complexity imposed by its onerous national caveat system in favor of coherent and practical rules of engagement and develop plans that allow its forces to respond to the full spectrum of hybrid war from civil unrest to conventional armed conflict. Preparing to meet the Russian threat requires material force and political will. Generating them today decreases the chance that they will be needed tomorrow.

Conclusion

Russian interventions in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine reveal an increasingly aggressive campaign to rebuild Moscow’s lost empire. During these interventions, the West did nothing to respond, even when NATO civilians were killed by Russian separatists using Russian missiles in the Donbass. The Kremlin has pursued this hybrid campaign on behalf of a Russian world wrongly divided by Western borders. It has blurred the lines between state and non-state actors. Its battles have been fought as often in the media and online as they have on the battlefield. Moscow has succeeded in halting NATO’s eastward expansion and punished wayward nations in its ‘privileged sphere of influence.’ Now, Russia will likely turn its gaze to its former Soviet possessions in the Baltics. Estonia is a NATO

member state that lacks a ratified border treaty with Russia and has a history of enmity with Moscow, making it particularly vulnerable to Russian intervention. While Russia has massed the means to blitz past the small contingent of NATO forces deployed to the region, it can gain as much, if not more, while risking far less by seeking to cleave a small portion of NATO territory from the alliance. Disaffected Russian compatriots in Estonia, particularly in the border town of Narva, offer Moscow the opportunity to weaken NATO if Russia can separate Narva from Estonia without provoking a military response from the rest of NATO. Seeking to avoid the choice between war and abandoning Article 5, Western leaders have pursued an array of regulatory, infrastructure, rhetorical, political, and military measures to shore up security in the Baltics. However, these efforts to avoid the dilemma are not an adequate substitute for the political resolve to face down Russian revanchist efforts, militarily if necessary. Estonia's future, and indeed the future of NATO, the EU, and the Western liberal order they represent hinge not on the efficacy of specific troop deployments or technocratic regulatory regimes, but on the ability to generate the political will to stare down the rising Russian bear.

“We will defend our NATO Allies, and that means every ally... and we will defend the territorial integrity of every single ally... because the defense of Tallinn and Riga and Vilnius is just as important as the defense of Berlin and Paris and London...Article 5 is crystal clear: An attack on one is an attack on all... We'll be here for Estonia. We will be here for Latvia. We will be here for Lithuania. You lost your independence once before. With NATO, you will never lose it again.”

-President Barack Obama, September 3, 2014

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