

# Moscow's Competitive Strategy

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## Executive Summary

Since at least 2005, Russia's leadership has believed itself to be at war with the West. This war is not primarily one of kinetic combat though recent moves suggest that Moscow believes such a war is increasingly conceivable. Rather it should be described as a new form of political warfare that derives in many from Soviet precedents.

Political warfare is a whole of government strategy where military forces play a vital but not necessarily primary role in the strategic rivalry with Washington. Their purpose is first to intimidate and then to deter the West, acquire a usable military superiority over neighbors and on Russia's frontiers, and sustain the regime and its view of Russia as a great power that is under perpetual siege from abroad.

The strategy then is one of "cross-domain coercion" as coined by Dmitry Adamsky and it ranges globally. Even as Moscow builds up its conventional and nuclear weapons (despite economic constraints that have even forced reductions in defense outlays) from the Arctic to the Levant, it conducts an unrelenting asymmetric information and cyber warfare that targets key socio-political, infrastructural institutions and grids, uses energy, organized crime, media and intelligence subversion and subsidization of foreign politicians, movements and parties for its aims.

Since 2016, the West has begun to come to terms with this "phalanx" of forces but it is clear that much more has to be done for Russia enjoys conventional superiority in Europe along its frontiers, is conducting an unopposed information warfare and the non-kinetic domains of its strategy are operating uninterruptedly.

However, we cannot simply dismiss the military aspect given Russia's problems and NATO's superiority on paper. Even if Moscow prefers not to wage an actual war against the West, it continues military operations in Ukraine and Syria while threatening NATO members from the Arctic to the Mediterranean and by regularly making nuclear and conventional probes and overt threats. Recent trends show that the Russian government is deliberately fostering a domestic mobilization program and war psychosis against the West.

Therefore, it is essential that we grasp Moscow's strategy and formulate an appropriately competitive one to negate its strengths and induce it to make strategic decisions that reduce its ability to mount successful challenges to the U.S. Apart from the incessant information and political warfare campaign, Moscow's nuclear buildup, which now includes both countervalue and counterforce weapons, aims not to escalate to deescalate in wartime but rather at a much broader concept.

This concept is escalation control, namely the ability to control all the phases and potentials for escalation throughout any crisis from start to finish. In achieving this outcome Moscow will both intimidate and deter NATO into accepting Russian faits accomplis, e.g. Crimea or Syria. In this way Moscow can exercise untrammelled sway over the former Soviet space and convince itself, its subjects, and the rest of the world that Russia is truly the great power it conceives itself to be.

In that case the U.S. and its allies will then have to treat it as an equal, essentially allowing it veto over U.S. and NATO military actions, and acknowledging it as having an unquestioned sphere of

influence in Eastern Europe, i.e. not only the former Soviet Union but even the Warsaw Pact territories. At the geopolitical level this is a strategy of inciting and exploiting every conceivable source of division in world politics, engendering an arms race that Russia thinks had already begun against it, and extending its claim to strategic real estate from the Arctic to the Mediterranean and global influence beyond those parameters.

This strategy also dictates the necessity of not just friendship with China but arguably of an alliance to force the West into accepting Russia's self-valuation and claims. This is not a formal alliance like NATO but the two powers share common frameworks of self-representation, a common animus towards U.S. values and power, and a desire to rewrite the rules and territorial parameters of the current international order to reflect more accurately what they believe is their rising and our declining power.

Russia, in response to its transformed strategic environment, capabilities, and understanding of contemporary war, has long since formulated and begun to execute a strategy that challenges the U.S. across multiple domains and territories from the Arctic even to South America, e.g. its position in Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua.

At the same time, Russia is also cementing a multi-dimensional alliance with China and threatening an offensive military and nuclear strategy. The persistence of this strategy and its refinement over a decade of policy requires that we too recognize that we are under attack and will be for some time to come. Therefore the West must formulate and execute our own equally competitive strategy.

We are confronted by a Russian adversary not only in possession of new weapons but also with new tactics and innovative thinking about contemporary warfare. Therefore we must also disentrall ourselves and think anew about that subject. This requires more than new, advanced weapons as promised by the third offset strategy.

Europe is under attack whether it accepts it or not. And Putin's Russia is an implacable foe, i.e. one that cannot be placated, for it will regard dialogue as surrender and proof of its allegations concerning the West's lack of moral fiber. Moreover, war is inherent in Putin's project as is empire. And if we are at war a strategic response is necessary that utilizes all the instruments of power and deploys them wisely

Therefore business as usual, as many recommend, is not an adequate reaction to our unexpected situation. Strategy, operations, force structures, tactics, and not least operational and strategic concepts as well as intelligence must be upgraded and adapted to contemporary requirements. That also means repairing broken national security policy structure so that we can bring to bear the full weight of state capacity upon our strategic challenges. All this must be a dynamic process with constant readjustment given the dynamic nature of our time. This is a heady task for any government but we all understand that today the world has no good alternative to American leadership.

## Russia Is At War With The West

NATO now acknowledges the growing challenge of Russia among other global threats but it and the governments who compose its membership refuse to acknowledge the fact that Russia is at war with the West and sees the West as an inveterate adversarial force.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Russian conduct has steadily become more brazen.

Thus Russia's cyber and information warfare operations against the U.S. during the 2016 elections were carried out in ways that virtually announced that it was Russia that was attacking U.S. networks and defying Washington to retaliate against it.<sup>2</sup>

Putin and his subordinates have long since convinced themselves of the existence of threats from policies or systems that do not exist. There has been no systematic policy of democracy promotion for years from the West notwithstanding Russian complaints or the laments of those Western groups who support such programs.

Thus Russia has created an endlessly self-generating feedback mechanism of supposedly mounting threats that it must constantly intensify to sustain its unreformed political system and mobilization state and economy yet which do not, in fact, exist. Thus it would be relatively easy for Putin's regime to persuade itself into believing that it is under imminent threat when no such threat exists.

This perspective underlies Moscow's belief in the necessity of permanent mobilization, militarization and information warfare (IW). Moscow's investment in the appurtenances of information warfare (IW) stems from its belief that it already is in a state of war with the West led by the US and that the internet in all its manifestations is an appropriate domain for conducting this war.<sup>3</sup> And at least some members of the administration like UN Ambassador Nikki Haley have asserted (rightly) that Russian cyber interference in the integrity of our electoral process is "warfare."<sup>4</sup>

Putin's war against the West is directed against the U.S. and allied governments' political and societal institutions to secure Putin's regime and undo the post-Cold War settlement, particularly in Europe. But it should be understood that for Russian leaders Europe is and has been since Stalin nothing more than a satellite of Washington's. They regularly decry this phenomenon as unnatural but that is what they see. Thus in August 2017, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that,

Anywhere, in any country – in Eastern Europe, in Central Europe – there are a lot of facts when the U.S. embassy literally runs the [political] processes, including the actions of the opposition – - I think they [American] themselves don't consider it an intervention because, first they [think they] can do anything, and second, it's in their blood.<sup>5</sup>

And in his interview with American film director Oliver Stone Putin stated that, NATO, "today it is an instrument of American foreign policy. There are no partners in it, only vassals."<sup>6</sup>

But this is not a recent war. Vladimir Putin has been at war with the U.S. and the West for over a decade.<sup>7</sup> Already on January 18, 2005 Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov told the Academy of Military Sciences, that,

Let us face it, there is a war against Russia under way, and it has been going on for quite a few years. No one declared war on us. There is not one country that would be in a state of war with Russia. But there are people and organizations in various countries, who take part in hostilities against the Russian Federation.<sup>8</sup>

More recently, Dmitri Trenin, Director of the Carnegie Endowment's Moscow office observed that, for some time, "the Kremlin has been de facto operating in a war mode."<sup>9</sup> One sign of this war is that by 2007-08, European Security services were reporting an enormous expansion in Russian espionage, both traditional and economic, across Europe.<sup>10</sup> That war is manifested in current military Russian thought as the promotion of "color revolutions" which the Russian military as any insurgency against authoritarian regimes in the recent past.<sup>11</sup>

In fact we may argue that war has been and is inherent in Putin's project from the beginning. Indeed, some analysts trace covert actions against Russia's neighbors back to 1992 and the Russian interventions in Abkhazia and Moldova.<sup>12</sup> Autocracy, Putin's legacy from the Tsars and Soviets, presupposes empire in Russia and empire under present conditions all but forces Russia into a constant state of threat, if not war, against its neighbors since it is consumed with projects that diminish their sovereignty if not their territorial integrity.

Indeed, as Russian civilian and military leaders came around to the consensus that the West was behind all these color revolutions and was looking to destabilize Russia, they concluded that not only did Russia have to wage a counter or asymmetric war against the West, but that it also had to become more autocratic and militaristic to save itself.<sup>13</sup>

This inherent gravitation towards militarization is inextricable from the fact that Russia continues to visualize itself as an empire. Already in 2000 Alexei Malashenko observed that Russia's war in Chechnya is logical only if Russia continues to regard itself as an empire.<sup>14</sup> Similarly Alexander Etkind observed in 2011 that Russian history remains one of internal colonialism.<sup>15</sup> As Professor Alfred Rieber of the Central European University has written, "For Russia there was no hard and fast distinction between colonial questions and the process of state building. This was not true of any other European state."<sup>16</sup>

This was also the situation in Soviet times as well where the state structure, domestic and foreign policy all came together and remains the case today.<sup>17</sup> The wars in both Ukraine and the North Caucasus confirm that this is still the case. Indeed, Trenin, along with many other analysts, has acknowledged that Putin's Russia is a Czarist state and this designation applies to more than just Putin's personal status.<sup>18</sup> As a result the wars in the North Caucasus, like the war in Ukraine, possesses extraordinary resonance for Russia's past, present and future state structure. Therefore, we have good grounds to assert that the resort to war is inherent in the nature of the Putin state and program.<sup>19</sup>

The structure and nature of Russian politics also generates a constant predisposition to magnify a sense of threat, if only for domestic purposes, and a tendency towards securitization and even militarization of many if not all aspects of Russia's politics, economy, and political rhetoric.<sup>20</sup> In other words, the default option of Putin's autocratic system which melds together kleptocracy, the ethos of Russian organized crime, the KGB and its successors and the Russian autocratic-imperial tradition inclines towards conflict with the West and repression at home.

As the Spanish prosecutor Jose Grinda who has investigated Russian criminal syndicates in Spain, stated, in the Russian case “one cannot distinguish between the activities of the government and organized crime groups.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed these two elements of Russian governance are inextricably tied up together and so Russian autocracy as such presupposes a conflict against the West even though the nature of the leader’s personality is crucial.<sup>22</sup> If we consider that Illarionov’s so-called wars also include “non-violent” conflicts and the possibility of heightened domestic repression using the instruments of force, this essay represents an inquiry into Putin’s wars and his “asymmetric strategy.”

In accordance with this statement, Russian officials have long believed and publicly professed that since 2003 the U.S. has been trying to foment democracy campaigns in Russia and the CIS to undermine existing regimes there.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly they continually promote the image of Russia being a besieged fortress surrounded by linked enemies: foreign governments and democratic reformers.<sup>24</sup> They thus extend further into contemporary Russian discourse the Leninist paradigm of linked internal and external threats and the justification for repression that accompanied that paradigm.

Today, professional Russian military writing defines the term “color revolution” essentially as an uprising stage-managed from outside by external political actors with an interest in the constitution of power in the affected state. The citizens of that state are merely passive bystanders or puppets of this external manifestation, a clear projection outward of how the Russian government views or wants to view its own citizens, and also the threats to it from their arousal.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore this sense of being under perpetual threat from within and without means that Russian foreign (and defense) policy approaches its tasks from the standpoint of what the German philosopher Carl Schmitt called the presupposition of enemies or of conflict.<sup>26</sup> We should take special note here concerning the explicit statement that the spread of democracy is a mortal threat to Russia’s rulers in and of itself.

Hence the demand for a free hand at home and abroad. But the demand for a free hand means an unconstrained foreign policy based wholly on power and the interests of the state conceived of in the most atavistic and unbridled form of Realpolitik, another example of the presupposition of being encircled by enemies.<sup>27</sup> And it invariably devolves into a regime based on nothing more than pure power, i.e. nihilism.

Newly emerging factors reinforce this disposition towards conflict and militarization. Since Putin cannot and will not offer Russians economic reform, he must offer instead imperial circuses to solidify his domestic standing. And since the “war party” is ascendant in Russia, it too must orient policy towards repeated probes if not confrontations with the West.<sup>28</sup>

Beyond these factors the geopolitical presence of China also drives Russia to confront the U.S. to secure recognition as a great power.<sup>29</sup> As Krastev also observes,

Contrary to conventional wisdom, Russia’s craving for global power status is not simply about nostalgia or psychological trauma. It is a geopolitical imperative. Only by proving its capacity to be a 21st century great power can Russia hope to be a real, equal partner with countries like China, which it needs to take it seriously. Believe it or not, from the

Russian perspective, interfering in the American presidential election was a performance organized mostly for the benefit of non-American publics.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, “If Russia does not gain recognition internationally, this would have repercussions in terms of identity problems and raise questions about the ability of the state to guarantee order and society.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore we should expect more probes, including nuclear ones or conventional threats backed up by nuclear saber rattling.

## Putin’s Way Of War

We make a grave mistake if we fail to realize that Putin and the Russian government have a strategy. Putin, despite the widespread view to this effect, is not a mere tactician or an uncannily gifted one but he does have a strategy.<sup>32</sup> To say this is not to make Putin out to be a strategic genius. It is only because of the U.S.’ seemingly inherent strategic insolvency and incompetence in crafting a grand strategy over the last generation that Putin has succeeded as much as he has and his reign has been marked by major strategic failures, e.g. in regard to Ukraine. Possession of a strategy does not ensure that it is a high-quality one, let alone a genius-like one.

Consequently, as Clausewitz indicated above, the first, and most critical or supreme and far-reaching task of our leaders is to recognize that our socio-political center of gravity as well as those factors of our allies, our values and our defense interests are under attack and respond accordingly. In the light of the new concept of security and of continuing astonishing technological developments, this war is not primarily or even necessarily one of combat operations though such operations are constantly being threatened and oblige us to prepare to meet or conduct those kinetic threats.

Rather the war is against institutions and values that impart resilience and integrity to our society and state. It is fought using the full range of the instruments of power: diplomacy, information, military power and economics (including energy), referred to as DIME. Therefore the priority U.S. response is not a military one, though major investments are surely needed here. Rather we call upon the U.S. and the West to grasp the overarching cross-domain coercive strategy being deployed against it and to respond in analogous fashion, i.e. by a truly strategic multi-domain approach.

This war is fought simultaneously across numerous geographical theaters on multiple levels including not just those material elements listed above but also the cyber sphere and mass media and is thus an ongoing psychological struggle in which the effective deployment of information constitutes a robust force multiplier that can be cheaply, repeatedly, and massively deployed at little cost to unhinge or derange an adversary and its society.

Russian leaders, like their Soviet forbears, seek to compensate for military and economic weakness relative to the other great powers have thus innovated what they call a new generation of war or new type of war much as Lenin and Stalin used the international Communist movement and mass propaganda, along with a gradually developing Red Army in the interwar years, to lay the foundation for a permanent state of siege in world politics that only ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Not surprisingly, a leadership composed of KGB alumni under Putin has resurrected that kind of thinking and warfare, shorn of its Marxist ideology, but with its mentality

and tactics fortified by new technologies and new tactics deriving from the reach of that technology.

Consequently the Russian strategy, for all its innovation, grows out of profound Russian and Soviet historical roots and must be understood in the light of Russo-Soviet categories of thought and action, to be countered.<sup>33</sup> Mirror imaging or complacent self-regard that our way of thinking and doing is better and that we only need do more of what we are doing or do it better will fail to come to terms with the current war and result in severe losses. Therefore it is incumbent upon us to grasp the nature of our situation and to innovate in both thought and action to meet these new challenges.

Although Russia more often than not utilizes non-kinetic tools like active measures, cyber and information warfare, and the energy weapon among others, this war features a profound militarization of Russian policy and an aggressive threatening posture towards the outside world. For example, in October 2017, Putin took the unusual step of publicly announcing his personal participation in a nuclear exercise using all three elements of Russia's nuclear triad.<sup>34</sup> Putin also attested to the ongoing militarization of Russian policy by announcing that over 2,500 military exercises had taken place in 2017.<sup>35</sup>

This is hardly surprising as Russia long ago abandoned any effort to impose democratic controls over its security services and has assigned its military intelligence service the GRU to formulate that threat assessment. Thus this hostile posture and the pervasive state message of Russia being a "besieged fortress" is an essential component of Putin's domestic and foreign policy.

The resort to non-kinetic and information warfare, as defined by Moscow as the primary instrument of this warfare reflects Russia's understanding that coordinated cyber and informational strikes, along with the synchronized use of all the other elements of DIME is what embodies contemporary warfare and that on this ground it can compete equally with the West.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, much writing on Russian information and cyber war (which for Russian thinkers and writers are really two sides of the same coin) is not only the most important domain of contemporary war, but also under certain circumstances, it can, by itself lead to victory and the enemy's strategic capitulation.<sup>37</sup> The Russian definition of the terms cyber warfare (*kibervoina*) or information war, (*informatsionnaya voina*) or information confrontation (*informatsionnoe protivoborstvo*) is holistic.

In other words, cyber is regarded as a mechanism for enabling the state to dominate the information landscape which is regarded as a warfare domain in its own right. Ideally, it is to be employed as a whole of government effort along with other, more traditional, weapons of information warfare that would be familiar to any student of Russian or Soviet military doctrine, including disinformation operations, PsyOps, electronic warfare, and political subversion.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, Russian military and civilian leaders alike increasingly expect that what they define as information warfare (IW), which includes cyber-strikes against critical infrastructure and C4ISR targets alike, will be the first strike of this war with the exception that IW goes on continually without letup.<sup>39</sup>



Moreover, they have for a long time fully believed that the U.S. and its allies are waging such war against Russia to the point of actually supporting terrorism as well as IW and Russian dissidents.<sup>40</sup> From Moscow's standpoint, NATO, even without being aware of it, has evolved what Paul Schulte calls a "strategic destabilization" capability,<sup>41</sup> or "cross-domain coercion."<sup>42</sup>

Cross-domain coercion has paid off for Putin because it grows out of his earlier experience in subordinating Russia to his rule through a domestic IW campaign in the first years of his presidency and thus is a proven concept.<sup>43</sup> Consequently he and his team have grasped the critical importance of information to contemporary societies.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, leading Russian military figures like former Chief of Staff, General Yuri N. Baluyevsky and retired General Makhmut A. Gareyev, President of the Academy of Military Sciences, have openly discussed threats to Russia in which the country might suffer even a crushing defeat without a shot being fired.<sup>33</sup> Already a decade or so ago Gareyev stated that,

The breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the parade of "color revolutions" in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan and so on show how principal threats exist objectively, assuming not so much military forms as direct or indirect forms of political, diplomatic, economic, and informational pressure, subversive activities, and interference in internal affairs... The RF's security interests require not only that such threats be assessed, but also that effective measures of countering them be identified.<sup>34</sup>

In today's environment, security no longer means primarily or exclusively the defense of the realm. Rather it denotes the resilience of a society to meet the multifarious challenges confronting it, including military defense. The integrity and resilience of societal and political institutions today is what Clausewitz would have called the center of gravity from which power springs for all belligerents in this war. In this perspective the centrality of accurate and true information to all socio-political activity, not just kinetic combat operations become quite clear.

Therefore Russian leaders and theoreticians rightly emphasize the information-psychological aspect of war as the most critical element, even more than actual combat operations and invest much time and resources to derange and unhinge actual and potential opponents. They see IW as a first strike and as something that can be waged continuously even in peacetime.<sup>45</sup> Thus cross-domain coercion actually represents a form of warfare targeted on societies and states' resilience and ability to comprehend and act upon reality.

These tactics highlight the fact that the psychology and character of the regime are essentially those of an intimidation culture. As the writers Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan observe, "The Putin system is all about intimidation, more often than actual coercion, as an instrument of control."<sup>46</sup> The emphasis on nuclear weapons not only relates to this system or culture of intimidation, it also fully comports with the long-standing element of Russian political culture that relies on the external projection of fear in order to augment the regime's domestic support.<sup>47</sup>

Consequently Putin's strategy has been to amass instruments comparable to what he and his entourage believe the West is deploying against them and deploy them preemptively and uninterruptedly against the West. Moreover, while the West devalues nuclear weapons in rhetoric and policy Russia must elevate their utility because it lacks other means of suasion that can be

deployed instead of nuclear weapons and intimidating threats.<sup>48</sup> This effort at nuclear intimidation continues.

The guidelines for this kind of war came right from Putin. In February 2012, Putin published a manifesto entitled “Rossiya I Menyayushchiyisya Mir” (Russia and the Changing World) wherein he wrote that,

The notion of “soft power” is being used increasingly often. This implies a matrix of tools and methods to reach foreign policy goals without the use of arms but by exerting information and other levers of influence. Regrettably, these methods are being used all too frequently to develop and provoke extremist, separatist, and nationalistic attitudes, to manipulate the public, and to conduct direct interference in the domestic policy of sovereign countries. There must be a clear division between freedom of speech and normal political activity on the one hand, and illegal instruments of “soft power” on the other. The activities of “pseudo-NGOs” and other agencies that try to destabilize other countries with outside support are unacceptable.<sup>49</sup>

Thus Putin’s subsequent attacks on NGOs hardly came as a surprise. Neither is it a surprise that Putin subsequently began his systematic and ongoing campaign to enlist the special services to expand their coordination to prevent extremist and terrorist propaganda in the global information space.<sup>50</sup>

It should be emphasized here that the doctrine’s guidance is that these measures be launched in advance of actual combat operations, thus indicating that Information Warfare (IW) and Information Operations (IO) are peacetime affairs and not just wartime activities. In other words, IW and IO should occur all the time.

Corresponding to that understanding, A.A. Strel’tsov, a prominent Russian theorist of IW, defined an IO as, “activities coordinated in terms of time, efforts, and objectives performed by agents to implement government information policy over a relatively long period of time that are directed at carrying out mid-term or short-term political tasks.”<sup>51</sup> In other words what we consider to be a time of peace, i.e. the absence of actual hostilities, Russia, as a matter of doctrine and policy is carrying out massive IW campaigns.

Russian leaders take both aspects of IW or information confrontation quite seriously. Chief of the General Staff, General Nikolai Makarov observed in early 2012 that while land and sea have ceased to be the main theaters of war, the focus has shifted into the aerospace and information spheres, including cyber security. Moreover, wise use is made of “asymmetric action, [and] the initial period of hostilities has begun to exercise a decisive effect on the way a war is waged and on its outcome.” Both kinds of IW can be used in that period.<sup>52</sup> In this context it is hardly remarkable that President Medvedev tasked the armed forces in 2011 to develop measures “to destroy the information and control assets of an ABM system as part of a campaign emphasizing the information-technical aspect of IW.”<sup>53</sup>

Russian definitions of IW and IO are notable because they openly talk of a long campaign that is carried on in peacetime to undertake what amounts to an information/intelligence preparation of the battlefield that can long precede the actual manifestation of overt conflict, as was the case in

Estonia and Georgia. Here again the distinction between peace and war has been effaced, indicating that from Moscow's standpoint "war is peace" and is being waged continually, even now.

Therefore we can argue that at least in the efforts to influence a society's "information space," there is no distinction between war and peace and some would also argue among war, peace, and the use of social technology for criminal purposes. This is a new phase in a process of "neither war nor peace" and a direct continuation of the Leninist tradition of a constant state of siege within and between states, societies, and blocs. Similarly there is no hard and fast definition, unlike U.S. thinking, between war and peace. Conflict in this environment is constant and one major target, especially in domestic political arenas or among populations at war with each other, is the mentality of the "home front".

Therefore the following observations apply to Russia with particular force for several reasons. First, the expansion of the "theaters" of military operations from purely battlefield phenomena to the totality of states' physical and socio-political networks can be construed as a direct evolution from the Leninist theory of political struggle.

Just as Lenin expanded "the state of siege" within Russian social democracy into a global one that reached its apogee in the Cold War and comprised struggles within states as well as between blocs on a global scale, information technology has vastly expanded the opportunities for almost anyone to conduct such operations in both real time and over time. Anyone can target anyone or anything else for as long as they want and do so with "plausible deniability."

Moreover, in this context, information technology and the uses to which it can replace the strategic and political role played by indigenous Communist parties which functioned as a surrogate for combat power that was missing to affect the political balance of power in targeted countries. Russian leaders, even before Putin's remarks above, openly viewed information technology as a non-military means by which they can achieve military, strategic, or political goals. One need not organize a ramified "organizational weapon" like the Communist Party to gain leverage if not control over a nation's policies if information weapons can be used adroitly for those purposes.

Therefore current wars have brought home to the Russian military that, "it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the information factor in local wars and armed conflicts of the early 21st century."<sup>54</sup> Equally importantly, the Russian power structures fully understand the capabilities of information weapons and the need for Russia to compete in their production and use.

Writing in 2006-07, Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov indicated Moscow's full awareness of IW and that it was a surrogate for a more classical military kind of operation. Indeed, Ivanov openly admitted that IW and IO allowed Moscow to find a new weapon to use in what might be called purely political, i.e. non-violent, warfare and update the Leninist inheritance of using Communist parties, fifth columns, and intelligence penetration of targeted societies as weapons to obtain political and strategic advantages.

Ivanov's statement strongly suggests that Russia sees its cyber capabilities as giving it asymmetric or alternative ways to counter these perceived Western challenges and threats by what are clearly militarily superior adversaries.<sup>55</sup>

Russian military writings are even more systematic and detailed about the inherent potential of IO and IW. A 2003 article by Naval Captain of the First Rank (Reserve) R. Bikkenin observed that IW not only occurs in the struggle between opposing military forces and technologies but also comprises "disorganization of all means of a society's life support, including the enemy military infrastructure."<sup>56</sup> Bikkenin included as part of his categorization of IO the use of the media, leaflets, religious propaganda and showing the extension of IW to this domain as part of the general process of securitization.<sup>57</sup>

For example, according to Colonel S.G. Chekinov, electronic warfare will become an independent operation in future wars, not just a support operation. This has happened in the war with Ukraine. Likewise, we can expect further technological breakthroughs in next age generation weapons that will combine physical, informational, psychological, and even biological weapons in combat over vast areas, including outer space, i.e. multi-dimensional warfare.<sup>58</sup> Remote operations will occur as much as direct force on force missions, the battlefield will be transformed into a "combat environment" concept, including virtual targets and the enemy's entire range of psychological orientations and capabilities.<sup>59</sup>

Chekinov and Lt. General S. A. Bogdanov (Ret) have subsequently argued that information weapons can already tackle strategic tasks such as disorganizing enemy military and state control, the aerospace defense system (which Russian writers expect will be the first target in a conventional offensive) , deceiving the enemy, creating the desired public opinion, organizing protests against the enemy government, and launching other operations aiming at reducing the enemy's will to resist.<sup>60</sup>

## The Nuclear Dimension

Today, as Putin is deliberately generating a war psychosis at home and abroad; prominent displays of Russian nuclear capability aims to frighten and reassure Russian audiences while intimidating Western ones.<sup>61</sup> As Schulte suggests, they are also used for domestic political and psychological-informational purposes as well.<sup>62</sup> As he argues, devaluation of nuclear weapons not only reduces Russia's domestic and global status, it also leaves Russia, in its leaders eyes, vulnerable to Western probes and attacks on both its foreign and domestic interests since they see us as using military power to threaten domestic change.<sup>63</sup>

While many writers have argued that Russia emphasizes its nuclear arsenal because it is one of the few things that enables it to claim parity with Washington and retain its overall great power status. We cannot lose sight of the overall importance in Russian political culture of displaying the state's capacity to intimidate others. Just as Russia needs desperately to see itself as a great power, it equally needs to be feared abroad. But since intimidation expresses a psychological relationship between the parties involved, it makes perfect sense that the prominent display of nuclear weapons carries with it a powerful informational-psychological charge that also fully comports with Russian strategic thinking.

We see this thinking in a paper prepared for this project by Jacob Kipp and Matthew Kroenig.

In the past decade and a half, Russia has come to rely more on nuclear weapons as a means of deterrence and for warfighting to manage local conflicts. The possibility of a local war against NATO remains Moscow's highest priority security threat. Russia relies on the early resort to nuclear use in part to offset its aggregate conventional inferiority vis-à-vis NATO. Moscow's concept of "de-escalatory" nuclear strikes envisions limited nuclear strikes on NATO targets early in a conflict in a bid to frighten Western leaders into suing for peace on terms favorable to Moscow. Even if such strikes are never employed, the possibility enhances Russia's coercive leverage in a crisis and to blackmail threats in peacetime.<sup>64</sup>

But while nuclear use in a first-strike mode to retrieve a losing conventional war and force NATO to de-escalate may be part of the strategy of escalate to deescalate, that arguably is merely a part of a much broader nuclear strategy that relies heavily upon the psychological and intimidating component of nuclear weapons.<sup>65</sup>

In other words, we can see a broader nuclear strategy that aims to use these weapons to control the entire process of escalation throughout the crisis from start to finish. If the crisis becomes kinetic, then escalating to de-escalate may well become operative possibilities.

For instance, in a March 2015 meeting in Germany, Russian generals told Western delegates that any NATO effort to retake Crimea and return it to Ukraine would lead them to consider "a spectrum of responses from nuclear to non-military".<sup>66</sup> Apart from the obvious physical threat and its intimidation quotient, the information conveyed here clearly partakes of IW understood in Russian terms as manipulating opponents' psychological reactions and hence their ensuing policies.

With similar ends in mind, Putin's numerous remarks threatening nuclear strikes and the regular dispatch of bomber and submarine probes to all members of NATO are clearly intended to intimidate and deter.<sup>67</sup> But it also is indisputable that for Russian leaders and commanders, nuclear weapons are to be used for war-fighting missions and operations. Sir Richard Shirreff, NATO's Deputy SACEUR from 2011-2014, has stated that "Russia hardwires nuclear thinking and capability to every aspect of their defense capability."<sup>68</sup>

Since NATO's Kosovo operation in 1999, Russia has gradually developed both a capability and a strategy involving nuclear weapons that Western elites either cannot or will not understand. And it is much broader than the catch phrase "escalate to deescalate" implies.<sup>69</sup> That formulation unfortunately exemplifies the increasing U.S. tendency (as U.S. understanding of foreign governments and their strategies decline) to mirror image countries like Russia and depict their strategies and goals as if they were America's.

In fact the nuclear strategy is much broader than the strategy that is imagined here. Furthermore Chief of the General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov has recently admitted that Russia has violated the INF treaty and his description of Russia's enhanced nuclear and aerospace strike capability attests to the priority these sectors receive.<sup>70</sup>

Russia's nuclear strategy must be viewed in the context of its thinking about and conduct of contemporary war in general. Thus we now face an innovative kind of asymmetric warfare that

constitutes a comprehensive challenge that simultaneously and constantly comprise conflicts that need not have any discernible starting point or phases as in U.S. literature. To use the U.S. military terminology, it is always phase zero and there is no discernible gap between war and peace. Or, as Lenin might have said, and certainly behaved, politics is the continuation of war by other means.

Ceasefires, actual conventional warfare and incessant information warfare – defined as attempts to alter mass political consciousness in targeted countries – occur together or separately as needed and are in constant flux. Regular forces can be used conventionally or as proxies, irregular, or even covert forces allegedly for “peacekeeping” or other operations. The actual use of military force depends on the effectiveness with which non- military instruments of power, organized crime, ethnic or other irregular paramilitary groups, espionage, political subversion and penetration of institutions in the targeted country, economic warfare, IW, and special operations forces.

Outright victory need not be the intended or victorious outcome. It may be enough to secure constant leverage and influence on the military-strategic, political and social situation in a state of no war no peace. Therefore both prosecution of such a war and resistance against it demands “quick decision-making processes, effective inter-agency coordination, and well trained and rapidly deployable special forces.”<sup>71</sup> Unfortunately those are all areas where NATO have been particularly deficient.

On February 20, 2012, then Prime Minister Putin said that, “We continue to see new areas of instability and deliberately managed chaos. There also are powerful attempts to provoke such conflicts even within the direct proximity of Russia and its allies’ borders.”<sup>72</sup> Since for Putin and his subordinates Russia’s borders comprise the Soviet borders, we get here some sense of just how expansive these threat assessments are.

Moreover, in Russian military thinking even small wars near Russia possess an inherent tendency that could lead to their escalation into major and even nuclear wars. Thus on November 17, 2011, Chief of the General Staff General Nikolai Makarov told the Defense Ministry’s Public Chamber that:

The possibility of local armed conflicts virtually along the entire perimeter of the border has grown dramatically...I cannot rule out that, in certain circumstances, local and regional armed conflicts could grow into a large-scale war, possibly even with nuclear weapons.<sup>73</sup>

Therefore, given such threat assessments, Russia must undertake a huge conventional and nuclear buildup by 2020, if not beyond.<sup>74</sup> For example, on February 27, 2013 President Putin told an expanded session of the Ministry of Defense Collegium that,

We see how instability and conflict are spreading around the world today. Armed conflict continues in the Middle East and Asia, and the danger of ‘export’ of radicalism and chaos continues to grow in our neighboring regions. At the same time, we see methodical attempts to undermine the strategic balance in various ways and forms. The United States has essentially launched now the second phase in its global missile defense system. There are attempts to sound out possibilities for expanding NATO further eastward, and there is also the danger of militarization in the Arctic. All of these challenges – and they are just a

few of the many we face – are of direct concern to our national interests and therefore also determine our priorities.<sup>75</sup>

This assessment is not just a personal or new one. Rather Putin has long argued this way and this assessment is also to be found in Russia's new Foreign Policy Concept of 2013.

This strategy was conceived of as being inherently an asymmetrical one and has deep historical roots. In 2014 in his annual address to the Federal Assembly, Putin reiterated that, “We have no intention to become involved in a costly arms race, but at the same time we will reliably and dependably guarantee our country's defense in the new conditions. There are absolutely no doubts about this. This will be done. Russia has both the capability and the innovative solutions for this.”<sup>76</sup>

Echoing such sentiments, Putin's adviser for military policy, General Alexander Burutin wrote that, “A crucial element in our plans for the development of new armaments must be an orientation towards an asymmetric response to the development and entering into service of the expensive new systems of the developed foreign countries.”<sup>77</sup> In this context, the Norwegian scholar Tor Bukkvoll remarked that in Russian thinking, asymmetric technologies should have a disruptive effect on new Western technologies, be developed in areas where Russian defense industry has particular advantages and be much cheaper to develop and produce than Western technologies. And these discussions also stress acquisition of anti-access and area denial (A2AD) systems and technologies.<sup>78</sup>

Therefore this orientation towards an asymmetric strategy must emphasize nuclear weapons, including among them both long-range, TU-22M3 strategic bombers and the short-range Iskander dual-use missile, as well as ICBMs, nuclear missile submarines, ground-based ballistic and cruise missiles, and a modernized conventional force to bypass the U.S.' ballistic missile defense network (BMD).<sup>79</sup> More recently Putin has stated that Russia's acquisition of SLCMs and ALCMs equalizes its status with the U.S and threatened that if Washington repudiates the INF treaty Russia will respond “immediately and symmetrically” by building its own intermediate range forces.<sup>80</sup>

Putin has repeatedly insisted that Russia focus on new and new types of weapons.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, from Putin on down Russian writers almost unanimously see the U.S. threatening both the concept of strategic stability and Russia by simultaneously building a BMD system in Europe and Asia and the capabilities to launch a Conventional Prompt Global Strike (CPGS) using high-precision conventional weapons, mainly delivered by air. Therefore the aerospace attack is threat number one. These new weapons under construction comprise of nuclear, space, hypersonic weapons, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones, many of which are intended to rebuff just such an attack, e.g. by using UAVs to counter UAVs.<sup>82</sup>

Putin's emphasis on creating new generations of weapons based on new physical principles such as beam, geophysical, genetic, psychophysical and other technology. He also singled out cyber, information, and communications technology, noting that as high-precision weapons proliferate and become common they will become the main means for achieving a decisive victory over opponent, including in global conflicts.<sup>83</sup> Evidently these are the categories of weapons that comprise the asymmetric strategy.

Under the circumstances, the armed forces must follow a deterrence strategy and prepare for a quick and effective response to challenges, i.e. be ready for anything on the spectrum of conflict. Even so, nuclear weapons and thus deterrence, mainly of the U.S./NATO but also of China, in both the strategic and regional deterrence contingencies will remain the priority until and unless Russia can field high-tech competitive weapons. Subsequent directives regarding procurement have followed along these lines.

Moscow's deployment of nuclear and conventional weapons indicates that it believes the former deters not only nuclear but conventional attacks. This mode of strategizing and thinking directly rebuts the complacent and groundless notion that nuclear weapons only deter other nuclear weapons. For Russia both sets of weapons are intended to deter the U.S./NATO aerospace attacks thereby allowing it to operate offensively within the umbrella of its potent integrated air defense system (IADS).

The 2008-12 defense reform that overhauled force structures and the C4I (command, control, communications, computers and intelligence) aspects of the military was then accompanied by reforms to the defense industry whose purpose is to provide high-tech weapons. This sequence goes beyond some Western assessments that overlooked the military rationale behind the overall economic reform of 2001-03 and accompanying administrative reforms.<sup>84</sup>

Rearmament was therefore not a second stage in reform but a third and in a sense a culminating. Much like Stalin in the 1930s, Putin argued in 2013 that "the changing geopolitical situation requires rapid and considered action. Russia's Armed Forces must reach a fundamentally new capability level within the next 3-5 years."<sup>85</sup> On March 20, 2013 Prime Minister Medvedev seconded this demand.<sup>86</sup> Medvedev argued that,

The creation of large integrated structure [in the Russian defense-industrial complex] is one of [Russia's] top priority missions. This approach has withstood the test of time, the consolidation of forces along the lines of the great variety of sectors in the military-industrial complex is necessary... the restructuring of Russia's defense-industrial complex must happen within timeframes that are compressed to the maximum extent necessary.<sup>87</sup>

Stalin or Brezhnev could not have said it better. Indeed, Medvedev called upon the defense industry not just to be a locomotive of economic and technological growth for the entire economy but also to grow at an annual rate of 10% in 2013-2015 and for productivity to grow at around 20% annually.<sup>88</sup> According to Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, Russia will train around 2,000,000 technical and engineering workers for the defense-industrial complex by 2020 with a special education program and massive state subsidies.<sup>89</sup> It should also be noted that Rogozin said here that,

The Cold War rudiments both in their organization, such as NATO, or propaganda, such as russophobia, forms have not disappeared. Western civilization is a condition of exhausting resources and is not going to give up the level of consumption which they got [and] have been used to for a long time. This means the struggle for access to these resources will become even more acute.<sup>90</sup>

Similarly, planning for the possibility of using Russian forces as expeditionary forces abroad also



preceded the seizure of Crimea in 2014 and was even announced in public.<sup>91</sup> Syria was explicitly cited in 2012 as the example of such planning and the plans also contemplated the use of Chechen troops as is now the case.<sup>92</sup>

These considerations also raise the issue of whether or for how long Russia can sustain this military buildup. It has already been clear that the defense budget for 2017-19 may well be cut cosmetically or merely seemingly.<sup>93</sup> But even if the defense budget is meaningfully reduced, Steven Rosefielde strongly argues that Putin has found a workable solution to get as much as he can out of the military-industrial complex with all of its multifarious economic pathologies. Rosefielde thus concludes that,

Russia is weathering the storms of plunging natural resources prices and EU economic stagnation better than predicted, and appears on both defense and civilian grounds to provide ample support for Putin's belief that he can successfully resist color revolutions and regime change in non-EU states of the former Soviet Union; thwart democratization, EU accession and NATO expansion on the Kremlin's turf, and expand Moscow's influence in Europe.<sup>94</sup>

Thus even without reform or transformation of the current economic situation, Russia can still largely though not completely fulfill the outlines of the vast defense reindustrialization and procurement program for 2011-2000 without breaking the bank either economically or politically at home. The recent rise in energy prices, Arab and Chinese support, and apparent bottoming out of the 2014-17 recession suggest that this neo-Soviet economic system of mobilization for war can survive for some time to come.<sup>95</sup>

Certainly Russian leaders seem to believe that energy will remain their "grave train" for some time to come. Contrary to the facile and complacent statements regularly proffered that Russia cannot sustain its defense program for the next 3-4 years Rosefielde's view appears to be supported as well by other Western findings such as those by this author, Richard Connolly and Julian Cooper.<sup>96</sup>

## Russian Objectives

To grasp the nature of this war and respond accordingly we must also understand Moscow's objectives. Obviously the primary objective is to secure the regime from the unceasing attack it believes is inherent in Western and especially American policy, namely preventing Russia from assuming its supposedly foreordained position as a great, imperial power and dominating the former Soviet territory, what it now calls Eurasia. But this objective goes deeper than a demand for restoration of hegemony of the former USSR. We should be clear that for Russia the demand for respect and great power status means empire or some kind of contemporary analogue to it. This could include territorial revisions of European frontiers as in Ukraine and Georgia, not just anaugmentation of Russian power in its borderlands although that latter goal is certainly critical.

So while Russian history may have bequeathed a heavy imperial legacy, Russian state policy, the current nature of the state and its resemblance to earlier formations represent the result of conscious elite decisions to seize power and hold it in accordance with Russian traditions, i.e. without recourse to democratic and legal means, even if today's world is utterly transformed from that of

the past. And those traditions most assuredly include as a key core interest of the state, retention of its neo-imperial outlook, tendencies, and powers.

Empire is, therefore, the natural and possibly most critical corollary of Putin's domestic autocracy. Indeed, autocratic empire is essentially the only form of state comprehensible to the Russian elite and could not survive without empire autocracy. Moreover, "pride in the empire is an important element of consolidating society around the president and legitimizing the current authorities."<sup>97</sup> Putin has abundantly demonstrated that he cannot and will not provide the benefits of prosperity that only economic reform could bring. Instead he and his entourage insist on preserving not just the autocracy but the dependence on energy which they believe can last at least another generation.

Igor Sechin, Rosneft's CEO, has publicly stated his view that while oil and gas consumption might slowly decrease globally over the next 30 years, they will remain primary sources of energy worldwide. The implication is, therefore, that Russia and companies like Rosneft can continue to place their reliance upon extracting hydrocarbons as a principal source of income, wealth and power.<sup>98</sup> Since empire is now the sole justification of autocracy along with the related obsession of proving that Russia is a great power before whom other powers are afraid and at the same time intent on destroying it, the domestic drivers for further neo-imperial probes, as suggested by Krastev above remain intact.

This obsession with great power long predates Putin but remains a crucial driver of many of his policies. Many different scholars long ago concluded that since public opinion is very interested in asserting Russia's great power standing, the elite and Putin must also be so interested even if they were not so personally and emotionally committed to this idea as they are. These domestic factors pervade all foreign and defense policymaking and particularly relevant with regard to Moscow's intervention in Syria for they provide the domestic basis for why Putin opted to intervene there. The overwhelming evidence is that this sentiment grips Russian elites and society even without the government's systematic saturation of the media on this point.

This concept that Russia is simultaneously both inherently a great power and a state that deserves to be seen at home and abroad as such or as an empire in order to survive – even if this can only be asserted irrationally and not by empirical demonstration – is embodied in the term *Derzhavnost*. This belief in Russia's great power destiny is an article of faith not subject to critical thinking. By trying to banish any hope of understanding Russian politics through critical, rational analysis, exponents of this view also typically overcompensate for the fear that if Russia is not a great power and not seen as such then it will be nothing. Putin, Yeltsin, and many other figures like former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Evgeny Primakov have repeatedly echoed this sentiment about Russia as an inherent great power who must act independently of other "poles" of the international system.

This understanding becomes particularly important because the Russian government explicitly regards its domestic security as unstable and the state as having failed to achieve the "necessary level of public security."<sup>99</sup> And this instability is traceable, in no small measure, to Islamic terrorism and criminality associated with that terrorism.<sup>100</sup> Therefore preventing the spread of terrorism beyond and ultimately eliminating it in the North Caucasus are major state priorities. Russian leaders' endless repetition of the fact that they intervened in Syria to prevent terrorists from returning home clearly has a basis in Russian policy and implicitly underscores the

connection from internal to external security even if Moscow facilitated the terrorists' movement to Syria to reduce the incidents of terrorism in the North Caucasus.<sup>101</sup>

Meanwhile this domestic instability clearly impedes realization of the great project of the Putin regime: restoring Russia to acknowledged great power status not only in the former Soviet sphere but beyond its borders. Therefore Moscow's actions abroad commingle internal and external means of ensuring security in order to realize this great power program.

Solidifying Putin's autocratic system at home necessarily entails blowing up the international status quo. It means undermining not only the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the states around Russia and exporting something like Putinism to them. In geopolitical terms it means reversing the process of European integration under democratic auspices that constitutes the fundamental threat to a restored Russian empire. Hence the invasion of Ukraine. As Vsevolod Horbulin observes,

The geopolitical purpose of Russia with the start of the global hybrid conflict was: to destroy the existing world order in order to restore the tension of the Cold War period and to occupy a position in this new world order while taking into account the strengthened China.<sup>102</sup>

The objective is to recover for Russia the status claimed in 1971 where he stated that no question in world politics can be decided without the participation of the Soviet Union. Or as Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov says now, "Not a cannon can be fired in Europe without our consent."<sup>103</sup> For example, in the Middle East, as a result of its successful Syrian campaign,

No state will be able to bypass Moscow when resolving regional conflicts. Already, France and Italy are turning to Russia to help integrate Khalifa Haftar, the Libyan military strongman whom Moscow has cultivated, into a UN-backed political arrangement.<sup>104</sup>

Not surprisingly, as part of this grand and neo-imperial design to undo the post-Cold War settlement, Moscow recognizes neither the territorial sovereignty nor the integrity of any of the states of the former USSR or Warsaw Pact.<sup>105</sup> Therefore a major part of the new war it has waged represents an attempt to dismember that sovereignty, and if necessary their integrity, to restore Moscow's power as a player equal to the U.S. globally that is capable and willing to challenge it globally and regionally.

Putin actually warned us about Ukraine for at the Bucharest NATO summit he told President Bush that, "But George don't you understand that Ukraine is not a state." Putin further claimed that most of its territory was a Russian gift in the 1950s. Moreover, while Western Ukraine belonged to Eastern Europe, Eastern Ukraine was "ours". Furthermore, if Ukraine did enter NATO, Russia would then detach Eastern Ukraine (and the Crimea) and graft it onto Russia.

Thus Ukraine would cease to exist as a state.<sup>106</sup> Putin also said that Russia regards NATO enlargement as a threat so if Georgia received membership, Moscow would "take adequate measures" and recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia to create a buffer between NATO and Russia.<sup>107</sup> Neither was Putin's outburst unrepresentative of Russian foreign policy. Instead it mirrors numerous statements by officials made to former Soviet republics and Eastern European states to the effect that they are not really sovereign states.<sup>108</sup>

More specifically Moscow aims to create regional bipolarity everywhere with the help of partners to force the U.S. to accept it as equal in creating and consolidating a multipolar world order where Russia is one of the poles that must be consulted anytime a crisis breaks out. Force or its surrogates in the form of economic and information warfare are major instruments of power to foster these outcomes. Meanwhile in Europe, Moscow's allies will be those governments or political movements that not only want to trade with it but that also espouse its domestic governing system, not the least part of which is systemic corruption, or are enemies of European integration. Hence the ongoing subsidies to these political parties and intervention in elections and referendums.

The following list comprises Russia's strategic objectives with regard to Europe. Since the 1990s Russian intellectuals and leaders have articulated a vision of bipolarity where the U.S. presides over a western bloc and Russia dominates an eastern bloc made up of former Soviet republics and satellites in Eastern Europe. Thus an overarching goal is the re-creation of something resembling this vision of bipolarity. In concrete terms the objectives are as follows:

Post-Soviet republics may retain their nominal or de jure sovereignty but it will be a compromised or "perforated" sovereignty at best, where Moscow exercises the real power over them. Ethnic and religious issues in these states will be manipulated, along with the use of corruption and all the instruments of subversion to ensure that pro-Moscow factions dominate wherever possible and discrete territorial or ethno-religious communities will be subordinated politically, culturally, and militarily to Russia. This means that their territorial integrity, e.g. the Moldovan, Ukrainian, Georgian or Azerbaijan, will be at risk if not actually compromised.

Militarily, Moscow will enjoy long-term if not perpetual bases (air, land, and sea) and suasion over the deployment of these countries' own military forces as in Armenia's case or loose liaison if not penetration as in Belarus.<sup>109</sup> We can also expect permanent Russian air and sea deployments in Syria and around the Eastern Mediterranean to fence that sea off along with the entry to the Black Sea, to NATO forces and thus isolate Turkey.

Lastly Moscow will make every effort, using all of the instruments of power, to ensure that these governments are not and do not become democratic and that they are tied economically to Russia either bilaterally or through the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Ukraine may be a lost case but Moscow is still trying, for example, to entice Azerbaijan into the EEU.<sup>110</sup> Equally if not more importantly, Russia will consistently endeavor to ensure not only the dominance of pro-Russia factions but that the state in all of these countries take on as much of the domestic trappings of Putinism as is possible.

Further West, Moscow will utilize all the instruments of power to arrest and hollow out NATO enlargement and prevent the placement of U.S. forces in Eastern Europe. It also is critical for Moscow to prevent the deployment of missile defenses since they are not only a visible embodiment of the U.S. commitment to defend its allies but also negate Moscow's major psychological-military threat to rain down conventional and/or nuclear missiles on Europe. A recent detailed revelation of recent Russian accomplishments in the fields of missile and aerospace attack and defense by Chief of the General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, openly admits that Russia has violated and is violating the INF treaty and has developed multiple strike capabilities for ranges up to 4000KM.<sup>111</sup>

Thus even if Moscow proposes arms control in Europe, the military objective is to neutralize NATO as a cohesive and coherent fighting force, divide U.S. and European allies from each other and retain full freedom to act in its “sphere of interests” militarily with impunity and free from possible retribution. Then not only will former Soviet republics fall under Moscow’s sway but territories from Finland to Turkey will come under greater and presumably irresistible military threats. This military outcome also entails an expanding A2AD network of land, sea, air, and cyber weapons to keep the West out of the Arctic, Baltic and Eastern Mediterranean seas. This effort to deny the West access into those seas through integrated networks of naval and air defense recalls the Soviet bastion strategy for its Navy.

In informational and subversion terms, Moscow will continue to acquire ever more media influence in Western media either through ownership or corruption and subordination of media and political parties across Europe, often by subsidizing those organizations. It will use the lodgments achieved thereby to establish permanent “beachheads” of pro-Russian business, political, and media elites in key commanding positions throughout Europe. Simultaneously it will endeavor to insert itself into EU economies and either obtain a special status, or seek to bypass or nullify EU rules that hinder its objective of dominance on the continent.

Wherever possible, Russia will seek to work bilaterally with individual governments to get around the necessity of dealing with the EU as a whole or simply to circumvent it and the European Commission. This will allow more and more unhampered energy exports to Europe and acquisitions of key roles in other sectors, not least of which is domestic distribution of gas. Revenues from these acquisitions and exports will continue going to corrupt and subsidize European elites who, in return, will support Russian political initiatives, push for more exports to Russia on generous terms and advocate for more technology transfer to Russia, both civil and military.

In practice, both the EU and NATO will be subjected to cross-domain coercion tactics and instruments that will corrode both organizations from within over time even if they remain nominally functional or viable. The hoped-for goals are the evisceration over time of both the processes of European integration and as Sergei Karaganov, one of Rusisa’s most prominent foreign policy analysts, told Bloomberg, “We are not interested in any kind of unity in the Transatlantic alliance, the weaker the better.”<sup>112</sup> A critical objective here is for Moscow to stop the pressure of Western democracy promotion and of accurate reporting concerning the increasingly repressive and even totalitarian nature of Putin’s system and to bail it out by loans, trade, investments, and technology transfer.

Through the immense and unblocked use of IW in all of its manifestations Moscow will also obtain permanent presence in Western political systems that have hitherto not yet figured out how to repulse these information onslaughts or punish Russia for them. So we can duly expect to see more interference in Brexit-like referendums, election interference as in Holland, Germany, France, and the U.S., and media penetration as in the Balkans. Likewise we can expect more military threats, saber-rattling of both conventional and nuclear weapons, and potentially more or bigger military operations in areas where Russian forces are already active. Thus the fundamental threat to European security and the Transatlantic alliance is political.

We can duly expect more initiatives along these lines to break up European integration and influence political outcomes across Europe, exploit any possible fissure in the structure of European governments, and thus block progress towards either European integration or democratization. The exposure of Russian interference in stoking the fires of the Catalan question in Spain excellently illustrates the rapidity with which this information weapon can be turned on or off not to create but to exploit existing cracks in European structures.<sup>113</sup>

There is no reason to assume Moscow will stop trying to play the Russian diaspora card in the Baltic States, Ukraine, and elsewhere or stop inciting ethno-religious minorities to incite ethno-religious and political disturbances, friction, and pretexts for intervention. Because Russia has invested heavily in a cultural-political project entitled the Russian world that attempts to weaponize the diaspora for its political purposes there is no reason to turn off this weapon when it can be reinstated at any moment. The fact that Russia's formal, legal boundaries do not conform to what the regime imagines its cultural borders to be offers opportunities for stirring up not just the Russian diaspora but the national card across Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.<sup>114</sup>

This particular manifestation of Putin's asymmetric strategy privileges the information or ideological domain in these borderlands and the West as the primary tool of power in the so called Near Abroad: namely ideological influence. Here Russia relies on inciting Russian language speakers, compatriots, and the so called Russian-speaking world in order to create a base to expand Russian influence abroad, destabilize targeted states, and then, having fractured those states, conquer and then annex them to create new bases for further expansion on other pretexts.

We can also expect Moscow to keep arguing through its supporters, trolls, and "useful idiots" for the erosion of the American commitment to European security. Indeed, the current forms of political and information warfare will probably continue to serve as the day-to-day mainstays of Russian operations across the West because information weapons are replacing fire-strike weapons as the main weapons of conflict.<sup>115</sup>

Insofar as Russia's borderlands are the site of the most intense forms of this political and military warfare, support for European integration and the Transatlantic alliance must become even more visibly the central pillars of U.S. strategy. Western ideological-political presence in these countries, not only "infects" Russia, it holds up a mirror to Russia that enables the population to see just how badly they are governed. That presence also conclusively negates the return of the imperial option without which autocracy becomes infeasible. Therefore this influence must be extruded from those borderlands at all costs for nothing less than the survival of the state depends on keeping those borderlands as spheres of exclusive Russian influence.

That objective mandates establishing "beachheads" of Russian economic, cultural and political influence and lasting military presence in those states to keep them as either buffers to push the West back or as bases from which Moscow can threaten the West. This objective also underlies the construction of the robust and integrated A2AD air, land, and naval defense network that we now see coming into being across these borderlands.

Underlying this strategy is the perception of a decadent Europe that is unable to resolve its socio-moral dilemmas and is falling apart. To quote one of Putin's most articulate and duplicitous ideologues and agents, Vladislav Surkov, "hypocrisy in the rationalist paradigm of the Western

civilization is inevitable.” Furthermore, “we know examples when civilizations reached a dangerous limit of complexity. what followed was either a collapse or a life-saving simplification of the system.”<sup>116</sup> This mantra tells Russians and foreign audiences that the Russian system is superior but it also reveals that even as Russian leaders want to live like Westerners and hide their money there, they have to denigrate the society for their own psychological needs to compensate for the reality that they discern around them and know is all too dangerous and backward.

While psychologically compensatory mechanisms are at work here, this perception of European decadence, i.e. Europe’s failure to become a self-standing pole of the “multipolar world order” facilitates Russian efforts to expose all the internal schisms in European societies. Consequently revitalizing European integration and economic and political development should be a prime objective of the West’s strategy. Facilitating those trends enhances European resilience, helps contribute to making Europe a genuine pole of power in world affairs, and negates Russia’s strategy as close to its borders as possible. Ultimately Ukraine should be included in this revitalization and even enlargement of the EU.

These internal schisms within Western societies are a weakness because they are exposed. Moscow must exploit those weaknesses while simultaneously insulating them from Western influence. It is the simultaneous and paradoxical perceptions of Western conventional military and material-ideological superiority and of decadence, weakness, and excessive pacifism that underlie Moscow’s concept of the Western threat and of the tactics, instruments, and strategies chosen to confront it at home and abroad. Thus the form in which Russia’s strategic goal of arresting or reversing Western democratic integration appears is Moscow’s unrelenting efforts to corrupt and corrode European public and security institutions, the EU, NATO and individual governments and states.

Not only would achievement of this objective relieve domestic pressure on the regime, it would allow Russia to dominate its neighborhood more or less free of Western political intervention, attacks or ideological diffusion of democratic norms. Moscow could then appear as the equal of the U.S. who must have a voice on all major international issues, especially those in Europe, the former Soviet space, and the Middle East. Consequently Moscow insists on both the necessity for and existence in fact of this multipolar world where it claims the right to be a “system-forming” pole equal to the U.S. and China.<sup>117</sup>

## **Out of Area Operations: Arctic and Syria**

Russian security policy not only updates the Leninist threat assessment of linked internal and external enemies who are everready to pounce, it also updates the foreign policy basis of this threat assessment. The components of this set of perceptions are the ongoing deterioration of world politics, the rise of more threats, particularly to Russia’s political order or to seize its natural resource wealth and the attendant need to squelch both foreign-incited revolutions as in the Arab Spring and foreign access to the Arctic.

This assessment predated the seizure of Crimea. Even though Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Denisov told an interviewer in 2011, “Luckily, we have virtually no enemies in the world today”, that is not Moscow’s stated view.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, former Chief of Staff Yuri Baluyevsky stated that the U.S. maintains a factor of preventive nuclear strikes in its and NATO’s strategy against Russia

and/or China and this is tied to the missile defense program.<sup>119</sup> Similarly Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told an audience at the annual 2013 Munich Security Conference that,

Even in the conditions of deficit of financial resources an increase in military activities is observed in the north and centre of Europe, as if in these regions the security threats are mounting. Advancement of projects for NATO's further expansion and advancement of bloc's military infrastructure to the East is continuing – as if there were no top-level statements on fatality of preserving dividing lines on the continent. Speaking of this, some of our European partners are now inventing new dividing lines, begin trying to artificially divide integration projects into “good” and “bad”, “friendly” and “alien”.<sup>120</sup>

On February 20, 2012, then-Prime Minister Putin said, “We continue to see new areas of instability and deliberately managed chaos. There also are powerful attempts to provoke such conflicts even within the direct proximity of Russia and its allies' borders.”<sup>121</sup> Since for Putin and his subordinates Russia's borders comprise the Soviet borders we get here some sense of just how expansive these threat assessments are. Therefore, on the basis of such threat assessments, Russia must undertake a huge conventional and nuclear buildup by 2020.<sup>122</sup> On February 27, 2013 President Putin told an expanded session of the Ministry of Defense Collegium that,

We see how instability and conflict are spreading around the world today. Armed conflict continues in the Middle East and Asia, and the danger of ‘export’ of radicalism and chaos continues to grow in our neighboring regions. At the same time, we see methodical attempts to undermine the strategic balance in various ways and forms.

The United States has essentially launched now the second phase in its global missile defense system. There are attempts to sound out possibilities for expanding NATO further eastward, and there is also the danger of militarization in the Arctic. All of these challenges – and they are just a few of the many we face – are of direct concern to our national interests and therefore also determine our priorities.<sup>123</sup>

This assessment is not just a personal or new one. Rather, Putin has long argued this way and this assessment is also to be found in Russia's new Foreign Policy Concept. Thus in 2012, he wrote that the global economic-financial crisis is systemic and marks a transition to a new geopolitical era. As a result the world is entering into a new period of turbulence which will be prolonged and painful.

Russia's interest in the Arctic is hardly new. There is also no doubt that given Russia's geographical proximity to the Arctic, it has loomed, and will continue to loom in Moscow's visions and policy. As Sergei Golunov has written, “proximity induces ‘grand desires’ when the willingness to exploit proximity is conflicting with illusory or limited opportunities. Even though sometimes such desires do not bring significant changes, they have some influence on regional, and sometimes even on global public discourse.”<sup>124</sup>

Thus, the 1997 Federal Target Program “World Ocean” placed special emphasis on the Russian littorals, including the Barents Sea, as foundations of Russian maritime power and as a base from which Russia could exploit oceanic resources. The program also noted that more than 80 percent



of Russia's then known oil and gas reserves were located in the shelf of the Barents and other northern seas.<sup>125</sup> Sensitivity to the energy potential of the Arctic predates the Putin regime.

Similarly, in September 2000, the Ministry of Natural Resources announced that Russia possesses the right to incorporate an additional 1.2 million square kilometers of the Arctic continental shelf into its territorial waters based on discoveries made by a Russian research vessel far beyond the 200-mile economic exclusion zone claimed by Moscow. It also announced it would subsequently hand over the required documents to the UN to substantiate this claim.<sup>126</sup>

This was before the U.S. Geological Survey of 2006 found even greater amounts of reserves and minerals in Russia's Arctic waters. This enduring confluence of seeing the Arctic as simultaneously the home of Russia's future energy-economic resources and of equally vital naval bases and targets ensures that in Russia, thinking about the Arctic economics and energy cannot be neatly distinguished from each other as guides to policy. This is recognized as well by foreign observers.<sup>127</sup>

Given Russia's enduring proximity to the Arctic and prior interest, it is not surprising that in 2007, soon after his famous speech to the Munich Wehrkunde that threw down the gauntlet to the West, Putin launched a systematic campaign to induce acceptance of Russia's expansive claims to the Arctic under UNCLOS. This campaign took off not from the atmosphere of Putin's truculent Munich speech, but rather from the general belief of the Russian establishment that the Arctic was a potential treasure trove and Russia was now under attack from the West.

Numerous commentators at home and abroad have observed that for some time, Russia has cast itself as a "besieged fortress", charging Washington with imperialism, launching an arms race, interfering in the domestic policies of CIS states, including Russia, expanding NATO, unilateralism, disregarding international law when it comes to using force and resorting to military threats against Russian interests.<sup>128</sup> This wide-ranging threat perception also embraces Russia's domestic politics as well and justifies domestic immobilism under the need to mobilize the state.

Regime spokesmen Vladislav Surkov, the father of the sovereign democracy concept, also openly stated that Russia must take national control of all the key sectors of the economy lest they be threatened by hostile foreign economic forces and so-called "offshore aristocrats."<sup>129</sup> In other words, this threat perception links both internal and external threats in a seamless whole and represents the perception that Western democracy is a threat to Russia. Therefore, U.S. and Western military power, even if it is not actually a threat, is *a priori* perceived as such. And this threat assessment and the suggested remedies to this perception of threat are clearly militarized ones apart from considerations of climate change.

Not surprisingly, and especially after the U.S. Geological Survey of the Arctic in 2006—the only attempt at systematic research into Arctic natural resource endowments—Russian elites drew attention to both the resource endowment and its link to defense in heightened fashion. In June 2007, Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky, CINC of the Russian Navy, drew heightened attention to the Arctic which he claimed furnished Russia with 90 percent of its gas, 60 percent of its oil, over 90 percent of its nickel and cobalt, about 60 percent of its copper and 98 percent of its platinum metals. While eight percent of the population lived in the Far North, they produced about two percent of the national income and accounted for two-thirds of the hard currency earnings.<sup>130</sup> Thus, he was

staking out a rationale for a priority naval role in the Arctic beyond the long-standing vital necessity of defending Russia's SSBNs in the Northern Fleet in the Kola Peninsula.

Vysotsky's remarks predated the subsequent expedition led by Duma member Artur Chilingarov to the North Pole that led to the publicizing of Russia's claims, and what might be called the start of the new scramble for the Arctic. Indeed, Chilingarov had warned in the Duma on June 21, 2007, that Russia intended to stand up for its lawful rights in the Arctic.<sup>131</sup> Russia's claims under UNCLOS, or rather the fact of a Russian claim, was perfectly within the legal parameters of UNCLOS. Moscow had ratified UNCLOS in 1997 but it did so with the important reservation that it would not accept "the procedures leading to the compulsory decisions regarding the disputes related to Articles 15, 73 and 83 that concerned delimitation of maritime borders and EEZ."<sup>132</sup>

Indeed, Russian policy originates in the belief that everyone covets its energy resources. Carl Schmitt states that Russian security policy begins from the generalized presupposition of threat and this outlook is apparent in every Russian official doctrinal and official statement of the last decade.<sup>133</sup> Russia's 2013 Foreign Policy Concept openly states that as competition grows around the sources of raw materials, their exchanges and their markets, this source of competition could become a trigger for future conflicts.<sup>134</sup> Official documents since then have reinforced and expanded this threat assessment.<sup>135</sup> Consequently, Russia's ensuing military buildup of the Arctic evidently intends to go beyond any idea of defending what really is a rather secondary theater.

Instead, Russia plans to engage the Arctic fully in defense planning for a myriad of threats going beyond risks to energy platforms and weather-related mishaps or dangers to commercial shipping to include full-blown military scenarios that comprise Europe, as was the case during the Cold War. Certainly, its deployments listed below indicate that Russia views the Arctic as a potential theater in a bigger European or even Trans-Atlantic war. But it also clearly sees security threats to its position in the Arctic originating in the Asia-Pacific region as well. These threats comprise a NATO or U.S. aerospace attack with missiles, air and naval strikes and even potential amphibious landings in the Arctic to seize energy installations.

Recent accounts indicate the magnitude of Russia's conversion of the Arctic into an international security problem. Moreover, Russia announced plans for continuing military expansion in the Arctic in 2017.<sup>136</sup> Russia's Ministry of Defense has announced that it is building over 100 facilities in the Arctic on its bases in the Franz Josef Land and Novaya Zemlya archipelagos, Sredny Island, Cape Schmidt, and Wrangel and Kotelny Islands.<sup>137</sup> U.S. figures show that in recent years, Russia "unveiled a new Arctic command, four new Arctic brigade combat teams, 14 new operational airfields, 16 deep-water ports, and 40 icebreakers with an additional 11 in development."<sup>138</sup>

Russia is also building up new Arctic coastal forces and state-of-the-art over-the-horizon radars that indicates its belief that the Arctic is likely to be the route through which a NATO aerospace attack is likely to come.<sup>139</sup> As a result, "interviews with officials and military analysts and reviews of government documents show Russia's build-up is the biggest since the 1991 Soviet fall and will, in some areas, give Moscow more military capabilities than the Soviet Union once had."<sup>140</sup>

So while the Arctic remains peaceful today, the military build-up, along with everything else that is happening, cannot but inflame allied suspicions. Putin has now called on the Duma to pass laws that offer "ships sailing under the Russian flag the exclusive right to carry and store hydrocarbons

along the Northern Sea Route,” an action that will “allow the growth of the amount of such shipments, strengthen the position of domestic shipping companies and create additional opportunities for the renewal of the fleets belong to them”<sup>141</sup> While this new decree accords with the drive towards import substitution and economic autarky, it will also anger other states trading through the Northern Sea Route like China and shows the abiding bias towards thinking about waterways near Russia as closed seas that are off limits to foreign, i.e. Western access. Because Russia’s current threat assessment is so extravagantly out of alignment with the reality of other Arctic states’ capabilities, we cannot simply count on the Arctic remaining a zone of peace.

## The Role Of China

Since 1991 it has been clear that any Russian state must have friendly ties with China to survive. Yet the movement of Russo-Chinese relations over the past generation has been unis-directional towards what both governments call a strategic comprehensive partnership. However, minority view of this relationship is that it has evolved since 2014 into a real alliance where China is the rider and Russia the horse. For Moscow to implement its anti-Western strategy on a global basis, it must have and increasingly depends on both material and intangible political diplomatic support from China.

A starker but not altogether way of putting this is that Russia increasingly can play the superpower game against the West because China allows it to and thus Moscow’s claim to superpower or system-creating status in world politics increasingly depends on Chinese forbearance and support, both material and intangible. Whether one calls this an alliance or uses the two governments’ term cited above, the fact of this growing dependence is incontrovertible. That reality is one of shared, identical, or converging positions on a host of international security issues that allows Russia to challenge the West secure in the knowledge of Chinese support.

Putin’s post-2012 presidency already heralded pro-Chinese policies as Russia sought to “catch the wind of China’s growth in its sails.”<sup>142</sup> In 2016 Putin stated that,

As we know the Sino-Russia relationship is now at its best. We often call it the strategic partnership, which I think is not only at a political level but also at the economic one. China is Russia's largest trading partner, although bilateral trade volumes have dropped a little due to the sluggish oil prices. To my delight, our cooperation has continued to diversify. Recently, trade volumes in high-tech and manufacturing fields have grown significantly. The large cooperation projects in aviation, aerospace, energy and nuclear power look promising. – We share common views in a series of international issues. Undoubtedly, it's a key factor in maintaining stability. We cherish the relationship with China and hope to further push it forward.<sup>143</sup>

Russia’s deepening structural economic-political crisis paralleled and intensified Putin’s policy, leading to another decade of stagnation from 2008-17 and further decline relative to China. Consequently, the most critical element in Sino-Russian relations is the growing asymmetry of power between China and Russia in China’s favour.<sup>144</sup> Indeed, Russia has frequently solicited China for a formal alliance. China’s practical response conforms to alliance dynamics even if it formally eschews alliances.

The hallmarks of this alliance dynamic are reversals of Russian policies to China's benefit, support for China on Asian regional issues and Russia's asymmetrical dependence upon Chinese economic, political and military support. Despite difficulties in economic issues and particularly in Central Asia, the evidence for all three hallmarks even in these domains is quite strong. Thus, China is the rider and Russia the horse in this alliance. By 2009, economic weakness forced Moscow to reverse past policy and admit China into its plans for developing Russia's Far East.<sup>145</sup> By 2012 analysts noticed China's ability to impose its agenda on Russia and gain disproportionate benefits from Russia while avoiding any lasting commitment to Russia's calls for an alliance.<sup>146</sup> This is even truer today.<sup>147</sup>

This de facto if not formal Sino-Russian alliance derives from geopolitically and ideologically congruent perspectives aiming squarely at America's values, interests, and the world order it largely created. It is not a binding wartime alliance like NATO or pre-World War I alliances but today's concept of alliances is much more elastic and therefore suitable to both sides. Admittedly these are contentious claims for many, possibly most, analysts deny that an alliance is occurring or is sustainable.<sup>148</sup>

Vasily Kashin, Senior Research Fellow at the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of the Far East, recently wrote that both sides may avoid the term "alliance" but the relationship already far exceeds "neighborliness" or even "strategic partnership" even though China's lasting gains in Asia are arguably at Moscow's, not Washington's, expense, most obviously in Central Asia.<sup>149</sup> Therefore we must understand what is meant by such an alliance. As Lavrov stated in 2014,

If we talk about alliances, not in the old sense of the word, not in the sense of tough bloc discipline when NATO was against the Warsaw Pact and everyone knew that this part of the negotiating table would raise their hands and this part would vote against it. Today such baculine discipline looks humiliating to states that preach democracy, pluralism of thought, and so on... Other types of alliances – flexible network alliances – are much more in demand today.<sup>150</sup>

Indeed, Moscow has frequently sought an alliance. In October 2014 Putin said Russia and China were natural allies.<sup>151</sup> In November 2014 Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu contended that Russia and China confront not only U.S. threats in the Asia-Pacific but also U.S.-orchestrated "color revolutions" and Islamic terrorism. Therefore, "The issue of stepping up this cooperation [between Russia and China] has never been as relevant as it is today."<sup>152</sup> Specifically, he advocated enhanced but unspecified bilateral Sino-Russian security cooperation and within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.<sup>153</sup> Shoigu included not only Central Asia but also East Asia, as did Deputy Minister Anatoly Antonov. Both men decried U.S. policies that allegedly fomented color revolutions and support for Islamic terrorism in Southeast and Central Asia. Shoigu further stated that,

In the context of an unstable international situation the strengthening of good-neighborly relations between our countries acquires particular significance. This is not only a significant factor in the states' security but also a contribution to ensuring peace throughout the Eurasian continent and beyond.<sup>154</sup>

This overture fundamentally reversed past Russian policy to exclude the Peoples' Liberation Army from Central Asia and retain the option of military intervention exclusively for itself. It could

signify Russia's growing dependence on China in Central Asia and elsewhere under mounting Western and economic pressure. Neither was it the only example of solicitation of an alliance with China. Putin recently noted that:

As we had never reached this level of relations before, our experts have had trouble defining today's general state of our common affairs. It turns out that to say we have strategic cooperation is not enough anymore. This is why we have started talking about a comprehensive partnership and strategic collaboration. "Comprehensive" means that we work virtually on all major avenues; "strategic" means that we attach enormous inter-governmental importance to this work.<sup>155</sup>

This is too close for advocacy of an alliance to be coincidental. But the alliance Moscow seeks need not be formally codified like NATO or pre-World War I alliances. Rather this alliance can remain a de facto flexible alignment with room for separate, parallel, or convergent, initiatives or even occasional disagreements in keeping with Russian views on the contemporary world order.<sup>156</sup> This conforms to Kashin, Putin, and Lavrov's observations on the bilateral relationship's tendencies.<sup>157</sup> Michael Yahuda also observes that Russian elites favor enhanced collaboration.

Moscow believes that bolstering China's military position in East Asia is very much in Russian interests. As the official in charge of Russian arms exports stated in April 2015, "if we work in China's interests, that means we also work in our interests." In other words, the U.S.-led economic sanctions on Russia have made Sino-Russian strategic interests more congruent.<sup>158</sup>

More recently Shoigu remarked that,

Russia's strategic partner is the People's Republic of China. Bilateral military cooperation is developing actively. Primarily it is focused on the fight against international terrorism. Joint actions are regularly practiced during the military exercises Naval Interaction and Peaceful Mission. The Russian Federation continues to prepare specialists for the People's Liberation Army of China. In total more than 3,600 Chinese servicemen have been trained in the universities of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation.<sup>159</sup>

This solution meets China's refusal to join formal alliances and Chinese leaders' repeated calls upon Moscow to forge ever closer ties and cooperation regarding Asian and international security, support China's vital national interests, and even build a new world order based on "global strategic stability."<sup>160</sup> It also allows Putin and Xi Jinping to pretend that there is not an alliance and that Russia is expanding its ties in Asia. Yet "Russia and China stick to points of view which are very close to each other or are almost the same in the international arena," Putin said, in 2016.<sup>161</sup>

Putin, since 2012, accelerated the alliance trend, making it a lodestar in his agenda. Putin, if not his colleagues, deny a potential China threat and deride that theory. They and China constantly reiterate that Russo-Chinese relations are immune to changes in world affairs and have never been better.<sup>162</sup> This policy replaced or supplanted the previous partnership where Russia maintained a certain independence from many Chinese policies in Asia.

Since 2012 we see actual calls for an alliance and important Russian concessions after 2013 to Chinese policies and interests that Russia hitherto resisted. These reversals occur in regard to arms

sales, granting China equity in Russian domestic, energy, and Arctic infrastructure projects, soliciting Chinese investment, Central Asia and East Asian security issues and possibly even strategic nuclear issues pertaining to arms control. For example, Russia's recent invitation to the U.S. to begin strategic stability talks made no mention of China, repudiating a past principle of Russia's approach to future arms control.<sup>163</sup>

This process also includes expanded military cooperation as shown by Moscow's invocation of Chinese support for joint naval operations in the Mediterranean in 2015 and the Baltic in 2017, and its acquiescence in exercises in the South China Sea in 2016.<sup>164</sup> Russia's advocacy of Chinese participation in Syria's reconstruction also suggests Russia's need for Chinese support for its Middle Eastern policies, an utterly unprecedented occurrence.<sup>165</sup> These concessions build on China's already superior bilateral position.<sup>166</sup> There also evidently is visible parallelism if not congruence in their policies towards Greece and Turkey though China clearly will not let Russian interests override its economic interests in Greece, Turkey or Eastern Europe generally.<sup>167</sup> Nevertheless East European analysts now report increasing joint Sino-Russian collaboration on economic and political projects in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>168</sup>

It is clear from Moscow's growing collaboration and dependence upon showing Chinese military force in the Baltic and Mediterranean and growing cooperation on large-scale investment projects, including the reconstruction of Syria that Russian power in Europe and its ability to concentrate its power resources there depend crucially on Chinese support. Therefore whether we call this an alliance or something else, the name is irrelevant for policy purposes but the reality is one of a working alliance. But it is and will likely become ever more of an alliance based on Russia's status as a junior partner and this has to be seen at home and abroad ultimately as a sign of weakness and of the hollowness behind Russia's great power claims.

## Russian Strategic Capabilities and Goals

Russian military capabilities may be a work in progress but they are unquestionably steadily improving and have been doing so for almost a decade. Aiding this process is that Russia has used the Syrian and Ukrainian campaigns, as well as its snap exercises to conduct a "roulement" or rolling deployment of troops from all over Russia into combat to give them experience in theatre-level war that Western and U.S. troops have not seen in a generation.<sup>169</sup> In exercises as well, e.g. the Zapad-2017, Russian troops exercised under electronic attack, again something with which our troops are quite unfamiliar.<sup>170</sup> These two wars, as Russian leaders endlessly reiterate, offer clues not only to future procurements but also allow Moscow not only to exercise its troops but to test a wide range of operational requirements, weapons and technologies in actual combat conditions.<sup>171</sup>

Despite visible manpower issues, Russia has demonstrated in practice its ability to concentrate and deploy forces rapidly at the key points or front line of conflicts in ways that have proven simply impossible for Western forces to achieve. These factors, with all the negative aspects of Russian forces taken into account, reveal just how difficult it will be for NATO to counter Russian escalation unless it accelerates and intensifies its comprehension of and response to current developments. As Rand Expert David Ochmanek has testified and frequently reported, Western forces would lose the initial round making escalation in a conventional theatre-wide conflict in Eastern Europe.<sup>172</sup>

Neither is this just a matter of conventional and electronic war. As the British analyst Keir Giles observes,

There is a parallel here with discussions of nonstrategic nuclear weapons – another field where there is intense debate as to the real quantity of Russian inventory but where quantity is of secondary importance. That is both because the available numbers far outstrip what is usable in the European theatre and because the doctrine for their use provides Russia with means of escalation or de-escalation to which Western allies have no response.<sup>173</sup>

Russian equipment also, in key niches like artillery, air defense, and electronic warfare (EW) also outstrips Western capabilities and Moscow is steadily moving to expand those capabilities beyond their present limits even as it moves forwards on new systems incorporating hypersonics, artificial intelligence (AI), robotic, lasers, UAVs and anti-UAV systems etc.<sup>174</sup> In this context it also is of crucial importance to take into account Russia's expansion of its naval and air base network that incorporates an ever more lethal A2AD network at low, medium, and higher altitudes based on land, sea, air, and autonomous systems.

These networks extend through the Arctic, Baltic, Ukraine, Caucasus, Central Asia, bases in Syria, upcoming bases in Egypt, potentially Yemen, Sudan, Cyprus, Libya, and even maybe Iran. These bases, replete with formidable missile-strike capabilities like the Kalibr' cruise missile or conventional Iskander and the integrated air defense S-300, 400, and eventually 500 aim to deny the West and NATO the ability to conduct its canonical aerospace operation from Central Europe and the Mediterranean to Central Asia, creating Eurasia as a kind of secure bastion against the West.

This may be a bastion strategy writ large but if continues to cohere, as is now the case with the expansion of these capabilities and bases we could attain a situation described by Major General Morten Klever of the Royal Norwegian Air Force “with [legacy aircraft and] the new evolving systems around us, we could easily be denied access to our own air space.”<sup>175</sup>

This evolving network of naval and air bases not only gives Moscow strategic leverage over the Mediterranean and Eurasia, it also affords Moscow unprecedented leverage over commercial, including energy flows, in the Mediterranean, Suez Canal, Red Sea, and even to some degree in the Persian Gulf. Thus we see Russian diplomacy which secures these bases, working in accordance with a larger strategy to deploy those capabilities to give Russia secure leverage and standing in economic and energy areas as well as military impregnability of its A2AD network against the West. Thus the military, IW, and political energies of the state are focused on the enhancement of Russia's overall strategic capabilities and the degradation of allied strategy.

Faced with the threat of NATO/EU expansion into areas it deems its privileged sphere of influence Moscow has incited and preserved frozen conflicts from Ukraine to Syria, including Moldova and the Caucasus. This outcome both arrests the expansion of Western security organizations into the states in this zone, it also preserves many of them in Putin-like systems of corruption, autocracy, and backwardness that afford Russia ample opportunities to influence or control their destinies. Second, it has taken advantages of the failures of liberalism, especially after the 2008 financial crash, to exploit every opportunity for seducing restive populations or political movements to throw in their lot with Russia against what they perceive to be a failed liberalism, as in Hungary.

While Hungary is a Russian success story we find these phenomena across Europe ranging from Brexit, to Catalonia, and across the anti-integration European parties of right and left. Political ideology matters little, what is critical is willingness to accept Russian subsidies, oppose European integration and democracy and stir up the national question, in it many guises across Europe, and thus thwart democratic consolidation or expansion whether in Serbia or the UK. At all times the objectives remain the same, prevent democratic consolidation and expansion, fragment the Transatlantic Alliance, leave Europe disaggregated and Russia the strongest possible power on the continent who can do as it pleases in its ever-expanding sphere of influence, give Russia permanent leverage through information warfare and subsidies derived from energy and corruption on European governments, parties, media, and elites. Moscow has grasped that in contemporary war the new objective is not victory as such, or territorial acquisition though it hardly disdains those outcomes. Rather the real objective is regime change and even more a change in the way in which people think about political issues.<sup>176</sup>

Russia wants to rip up the established international order that has developed since 1989 and return not to a Cold War but to the status it had during the Cold War. Force alone will not suffice for Russia; thus it has to resort to what its leaders call new generation warfare to bring about this new multipolar. Russia's strategy also takes for granted Western degeneration, and decline or at least inattention and inability to grasp what is happening and is conducted on a global scale, as our own experience in 2016 and Russian operations in places like Latin America show us. It is conducted as wartime operations and its battleground is global, including the internal structures of government here, in the UK, Germany, France, etc.

In IW, the capabilities Moscow brings to bear are universally available. But Moscow has mobilized them creatively using its own theory of IW that makes it the most critical domain of warfare and one that pervades both kinetic and non-kinetic operations. Therefore tools like media ownership, trolls, fake news, systematic disinformation, subsidizing political parties abroad, incitement of ethno-religious tensions, weaponizing refugees, etc. are conducted concurrently with kinetic operations in Syria and Ukraine and the ongoing development of an ever more powerful kinetic force to deter and intimidate neighbours and interlocutors while corrupting them from the inside.

A recent Chatham House study by Keir Giles emphasized Russia's ability to purchase or co-opt business and political elites to create "compliant networks", generate "agents of influence" or "Trojan horses" in foreign governments and institutions that offer Russia leverage over them.<sup>177</sup> This is particularly notable where ethnic and/or religious cleavages furnish Russia with the means for exploiting those as is now happening with Muslim migration to Europe.<sup>178</sup> For Russia the phenomenon of nationalism begs to be instrumentalized for the state's benefit. In the Balkans Moscow supports the Hungarian minority against Ukraine, Serbs against Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia, even to the degree of launching a coup in 2016-17 in Montenegro using Serbs.<sup>179</sup> As a result Russia has developed a formidable range of IW capabilities. As recently described by Edward Lucas, they comprise:

- The targeted use of corruption;
- Cyber-attacks on the confidentiality, integrity and availability of data held on a target country's computer systems;



- Diplomatic divide-and-rule games designed to weaken multilateral rule-based organizations and to create the perception of the targeted country's isolation and indefensibility;
- The exploitation of economic, ethnic, linguistic, regional, religious, social and other divisions;
- Economic sanctions such as import curbs and restrictions on exports and transit;
- Interference with energy supplies, especially natural gas;
- Stoking financial panics;
- Weaponizing history to besmirch the reputation of a target country and hide Kremlin crimes;
- Covert information operations such as the hacking and leaking attacks seen in the U.S. and French presidential elections;
- Abuse of the international legal system, such as issuing Interpol Red Notices to critics, mounting libel actions and vexatious lawsuits;
- Military bluffing and saber-rattling;
- Irregular and regular warfare;
- The use of organized crime networks to demoralize decision-makers and public opinion;
- Overt and covert payments to buy influence in political parties, think tanks, media outlets and academic institutions;
- Physical intimidation of opponents and critics;
- Psychological warfare on an individual and collective basis;
- The exploitation of religious sentiment, especially among Orthodox believers;
- Physical sabotage of critical infrastructure;
- The targeted use of social media to affect public opinion;
- Subversion of social norms, public confidence and state institutions; and
- Support for violent anti-social behavior.<sup>180</sup>

Furthermore,

To complicate matters further, these tactics are not applied in a static or even linear formation. Russia's spymasters are not stupid. They develop new approaches, especially new combinations and sequences of tactics, tweaking them based on what works and what doesn't. We think we are looking at a picture; our adversaries are writing a screenplay.<sup>181</sup>

Ultimately of course, the deployment of these capabilities aims at the permanent destabilization of its neighbors and rivals and the acquisition thereby of a free hand at home and abroad. Concurrently, Susan Stewart of the Stiftung Wissenschaft Und Politik in Germany writes that,

Russia is more than willing to tolerate instability and economic weakness in the neighboring countries, assuming they are accompanied by an increase in Russian influence. In fact, Russia consciously contributes to the rising instability and deterioration of the economic situation in some, if not all, of these countries.<sup>182</sup>

## Russian Military Capabilities Where Moscow Possesses A Comparative Advantage

To redefine the geopolitical status quo and the post-Cold War settlement Russia has created many formidable capabilities though they have their shortcomings as well. What might be called the new Russian way of war has highlighted these capabilities and revealed the extent to which Moscow may use them in present and future conflicts. Before moving onto a discussion of those capabilities where Moscow possesses a comparative advantage vis-à-vis potential adversaries we need to understand that what makes for this advantage is not necessarily the technological quality of these weapons even though some areas like anti-ship missile and boosters or artillery in general are traditional centers of excellence.

Rather what is critical is that Moscow has embarked upon a never-ending process of rethinking contemporary warfare and its strategic-operational, tactical requirements to defeat the U.S. and lesser threats and is shaping its forces accordingly. In other words the innovative concepts married to technologies, including new ones and weapons to come based on “new physical principles” is what makes its military and information capabilities so lethal. If anything Moscow has thought more seriously about contemporary warfare than have its Western adversaries many of whom still prefer like ostriches to keep their head in the sand.

Therefore superior technology, economies and manpower bases do not assure victory if strategic thinking and aptitude are lacking which is still too often the case. Moreover, Russia’s political system places few if any inhibitions or barriers to the unceasing use of any and all of its instruments of power so that it can deploy its non-kinetic energy, economic, and information capabilities at all times in a threatening way.

In this context the areas where Russia has displayed a comparative advantage include paramilitary and regular military forces as well as cyber and IW capabilities that have now received extensive scrutiny. These go along with Moscow’s nuclear, space and non-kinetic capabilities like its diplomacy and economic and organized criminal influence abroad. In addition these non-kinetic capabilities comprise not just pro-Russian elements abroad but those segments of the Russian diaspora who can be utilized willingly or unwittingly to advance Russian strategic interests. Moreover, as in so many instances of Russian history, Moscow has applied what it believes it has learned from the West to advance its interests. One particular example is the use of private or paramilitary organizations, in the former case derived from the Blackwater and other such cases, to perform combat or combat support activities for Moscow.

### Paramilitary Forces

Beyond the private Wagner and other such forces described below we must also take into account paramilitary forces. Ramzan Kadyrov, the Chechen strongman, has raised and commands an army of 40,000 battle-hardened and well-armed men loyal to Putin outside of the Russian army. He offered to use them in Ukraine and Chechens fought there for Russia. But since then there has been talk of using them in Afghanistan or Central Asia against terrorists and they are now being used in Syria as military police. Indeed, Kadyrov announced his willingness to send Chechens to perform special military missions for Putin that other organizations of the Russian forces cannot perform, such as in Ukraine or as Putin’s palace guard, or perhaps in Central Asia.<sup>183</sup>

The Chechen forces, because they are Muslims, enable Moscow to use Muslims to police other Muslims at home and abroad in keeping with long-standing tendencies in Russian imperial management.<sup>184</sup> But they also provide Moscow with a formidable force outside the regular state administration that is wholly loyal to Putin. In this regard they are parallels to the plethora of paramilitary groups within Russia that have emerged within the Ministry of Interior after 2005 whose mission is simply protection of Putin and/or the government.<sup>185</sup>

These forces have since continued to exist alongside of the regular state police and military forces but many of them have since been amalgamated into the Russian National Guard, though the Guard's main function is to protect Putin and/or the government. Despite its primarily domestic mandate the Guard has conducted joint anti-terrorist drills with the Chinese armed police and have been licensed to conduct foreign peacekeeping operations.<sup>186</sup> So there is also no doubt that this force of about 400,000 people across Russia could easily be mobilized if the need arose.

Moscow has also resorted to drafting members of the Russian diaspora in the Donbass under supposedly retired or no longer active Russian army officers. It is well known that they had to be rescued by regular army units in 2014-15, and since then have been reborn as trained and essentially integrated members of the Russian army with Russian commanders and fire support. Were Moscow to invade the Baltic there is little doubt it would attempt to repeat this experiment, albeit more successfully if possible.

In its preparations for Ukraine, Moscow used the services and wealth of the Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev to recruit and finance "volunteers" for action in Ukraine. Malofeev may also have helped inspire the actual strategy used in seizing Crimea.<sup>187</sup> And Malofeev, along with other oligarchs, has been linked to efforts to subvert the Polish government.<sup>188</sup> Malofeev also links up to other semi-public "political entrepreneurs" who either organize, bankroll, or incite the formation of links between right-wing political parties, the Orthodox Church, media outlets civic and political figures and parties in the Balkans inter alia.<sup>189</sup>

This tactic allows Moscow to establish linkages not only with right-wing political parties but with shadowy right-wing paramilitary groups. For example in Hungary GRU members have conducted ties with the right-wing Hungarian Army MNA funneling arms and ammunition to them.

This kind of evolving liaison between the neo-Nazi MNA, its media and Kremlin figures fits perfectly into the Kremlin's increasingly decentralized post-Crimea disinformation operation in Central Eastern Europe based on locally operated pro-Russian new media platforms embedded into extremist political subcultures, usually espousing extreme right and extreme left ideologies, their numbers running in the hundreds in the region and around 100 in Hungary alone.<sup>190</sup>

Russia's intervention in Syria also highlights the ability to use the Western technique of private contractors for state objectives. In Syria thousands of private contractors called Wagner are fighting for Russia since September 2015 when Moscow first intervened there.<sup>191</sup> This private army has also seen action in Ukraine receiving about 120,000/month there (\$2000). According to Ukrainian sources it comprised 2000-5000 men in Ukraine who were well-trained professional soldiers as well as tanks, howitzers and multiple launch rocket systems.

Apparently they answer only to another oligarch, Evgeny Prigozhin, Putin's restaurant guru and food supplier to the Russian army. Reportedly in Syria there are about 3-4000 such forces.<sup>192</sup> The forces involved with Wagner and other such groups first fought in Yugoslavia's wars in the 1990s and then Chechnya and since then Ukraine and now Syria.<sup>193</sup> Wagner has also fought and taken substantial casualties in Syria.

The advantage of such groups is that they allow Putin not only to impose his order at home but also abroad using professional soldiers, diaspora figures, mercenaries and Chechens with considerable plausible deniability and in many cases at someone else's expense, i.e. oligarchs. These forces are particularly useful, for the most part in grey area contingencies and smaller wars or as supplements to Russian regular forces who can be seeded among them to command and train them but who can hide among them allowing the government to deny its presence.

They also can perform major combat support operations or be used as private mercenary forces that can be "rented out" to friendly foreign governments under threat. This actually appears to have been the case regarding the Wagner forces in Syria before 2015.<sup>194</sup> Therefore it is unlikely that we have seen the end of the use of such forces by Moscow.

In fact there are recent reports suggesting that they may play a bigger role in future contingencies.<sup>195</sup> In 2012 Putin said that such companies implement national interests without the direct involvement of the state and should be utilized.<sup>196</sup> By contracting out requirements for such forces Putin, can, in areas where scarce specialities are needed, e.g. foreign languages, recruit forces who offer some professionalism, subservience to Moscow and plausible deniability at reduced cost in money and casualties to the regular forces.

Moscow can also hide its hand behind these forces and minimize its public exposure. Since the use of such forces like the Wagner firm began in 2013 they have not only appeared in Ukraine and Syria, but there are also now reports of their presence in Libya. Moreover in Syria Moscow is apparently granting oil and mining rights in Syria to private military contractors that secure territory from extremists thereby melding business and state interest for these firms and the central government.<sup>197</sup>

These private armies are kinetic analogues to the thousands of trolls Moscow employs at home and abroad to conduct its IW campaigns. We also know of private and organized crime groups like the Russian Business Network (RBN) who were instrumental in the Georgia and Estonian IW campaigns in 2007-08. It is worth emphasizing that in Estonia and in subsequent manifestations of IW and IO, the Russian government has cooperated with organized crime structures like RBN to launch attacks. According to researchers Eli Jellenc and Kimberly Zenz:

RBN is a cyber crime organization that ran an internet service provider (ISP) until 2007 and continues to be heavily involved in cyber crime such as phishing, malware distribution, malicious code, botnet command and control, DDOS attacks, and child pornography. Though the most recent structure of RBN began in 2005, there are rumors that date RBN (as an unofficial group of cyber criminals) back to 1996.

In 2002, the group became more structured and more active. It was accused of attacking the United States Department of Defense and the Russian Department of the Treasury in

2003, though none of this can be proven officially. While it is not certain that RBN is directly connected to the Russian mafia, it is highly likely. RBN is heavily involved in child pornography, which is traditionally controlled by the Russian mafia, and its official leader, who goes by the alias “Flyman,” is suspected of running those operations (and of possibly being a pedophile himself).

It is also known that Flyman has family connections to the government: his father or uncle was involved in politics in St. Petersburg before taking an important position at a ministry in Moscow. Another RBN member, Aleksandr Boykov, is a former lieutenant colonel in the *Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti* (FSB, the successor agency to the KGB). While it is currently not possible to prove that RBN has worked in tandem with the FSB or other security services (collectively, the *Siloviki*), it is likely that they are at least connected.

When RBN officially hosted Internet services between early 2006 and November 2007, it was linked to 60 percent of all cyber crime. Due to increased pressure (including blocking and blacklisting of RBN IP addresses and domains) from the cyber security industry and increased attention in published reports and news articles, RBN attempted to restructure itself in October 2007, concealing its affiliations with a variety of IPs. When this failed, it deleted a number of its domains and shut down, moving to Chinese and Taiwanese networks on November 6, 2007. This failed to divert attention, however, and two days later, it ceased routing traffic and its networks.

However, it would be incorrect to say that RBN no longer exists or even that it has disbanded. While it no longer runs an ISP, the group appears to be active still and harder to track on a much more dispersed level across a variety of mostly legitimate ISPs. In general, Russian cyber crime certainly has not decreased with the end of RBN’s ISP. Instead, it continues to grow, spread across a variety of ISPs and domains, and in February 2008, Russia surpassed China as the largest generator of malware, with 27.9 percent compared to China’s 26.5 percent (the United States is a distant third at 9.98 percent). Cybersecurity experts continue to use the term “RBN” to refer to the loosely organized group of cyber criminals based in Russia, and cyber activity and crime by this group continue to remain high.<sup>198</sup>

Inasmuch as the RBN is still in business it embodies not only the use of seemingly private entities for state military purposes abroad it also epitomizes the utter criminality of the Putin regime which rules Russia like a mafia thinks and acts accordingly. Thus the RBN and the trolls reflect part of Moscow’s comparative advantages in IW and in smaller-scale conventional contingencies.

## Information Warfare

Russia’s assault upon the entire Western information space, both civilian and military may be the most important weapon in its arsenal and the one where it has clearly garnered a comparative advantage. It is not technical sophistication but innovative conceptualization of the battlefield that has expanded to include the entire socio-political arena and the willingness to throw resources at it on a constant basis is the enabling factor here along with Western neglect. This is not merely buying up media in Europe or elsewhere though media ownership certainly is an important part of

this arsenal. Instead it is the concept that military-political goals can be achieved solely or primarily over time by the application of Russia's concept of information warfare.

There is no real distinction in Moscow's concept of information confrontation between attacking cyber networks like civilian power grids and networks, or attacking military ones such as space-based and civilian ISR networks, or the saturation of the social and other media spaces with pro-Russian narratives. These are all part of the same process and aim to inhibit or paralyze enemy military action and, if possible, to bring about an internal capitulation of the target from within over time. IW is used without letup in both peace and war indicating Moscow's permanent perception of being at war. It is broad-gauged aiming to insert its narrative and sow doubt on Western policies and values at all times thereby creating a sizable bloc of people who will not accept their own government's account of contemporary strategic phenomena even if they are not supporters of Russia.

By utilizing useful idiots as well as the willing and credulous, Moscow seeks to maintain permanent pressure on targeted states and can implement this weapon in doing so because of its well-known advantages. Those are the relative cheapness of cost, and the difficulties in attribution of the sources of information attacks and operations (IOs). Moscow also readily exploits the freedoms of Western societies to insert its channels of communication and then hides behind these freedoms precisely to subvert them and Western governments. So apart from its ability to exploit Western freedoms, the easiness of entry into IW and the difficulties of attribution, Moscow's main advantage stems from its consistency in waging this kind of war because its reconceptualization of its current strategic position and of contemporary warfare leads it to look for imaginative workarounds or surrogates for military force in challenging the West from an inferior position.

The upshot is that it can place entire societies in a state of permanent psychological apprehension solely through the application of these informational and political warfare instruments. Contemporary American politics attests to the success of this maneuver but it is hardly only happening here. A 2009 assessment of Russian policy in Latvia concluded,

We see several, interrelated short-term [Russian] strategies focusing on exercising ever-increasing influence in the politics of the target states. What we do not see is a policy of military conquest but, rather, a gradual but unswerving drive to eventually regain dominance over the social, economic, and political affairs of what are to become entirely dependent client states.<sup>199</sup>

A more recent article observed that,

The idea that Moscow could intervene in the Baltic states on the basis of alleged discrimination against Russian-speakers has been a fundamental feature of Moscow's Baltic policy. Several studies have explored the motivations, mechanisms and organizations involved in carrying out Russia's compatriot policy as well as its direct impact on ethnopolitics and minority mobilization in Estonia and Latvia.<sup>200</sup>

To this end, Moscow has long since created multiple organizations of diaspora and informational mechanism to keep the pressure constantly on the Baltic States.<sup>201</sup> Furthermore it is clear that by keeping these states under pressure Moscow, as seen in its exercises and deployments, keeps the

options of invading them or precipitating their collapse as a central strategic objective for Russian planners have realized since 1935 if not earlier that without occupation of the Baltic coast, Russia would be hard pressed to defend against an invasion from the West which it continues to expect.<sup>202</sup>

## Conventional Warfare

This consideration leads us to assess the advantages Moscow might possess in a conventional war in Eastern Europe. Undoubtedly it still retains operational superiority; the Zapad-2017 exercise confirms that it will continue to refine its ability to deliver rapidly lethal force packages to those theaters from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and possibly the Arctic as well. Although NATO's capabilities in Poland and the Baltic states as well as the Black Sea are growing, so too are Moscow's as is the quality of both sets of forces. And given the sluggishness with which Europe has reacted to the present crisis, it is clear that Moscow's geographical advantage of proximity to the theater will remain.

In this context Moscow disposes of certain strong comparative advantages, particularly in air defense or the creation of an A2AD capability, that comprises anti-air and anti-ship capabilities in layered, combined arms, and integrated networks or an IADS, artillery, and EW. Once again these "niches of excellence" derive from both Russian historical tradition and equally from the reconceptualization of what Russia must do to deny the West, and particularly the U.S. its preferred mode of operation, namely long-range precision strike by an integrated aerospace operation in the form of Offensive Counter Air operation. This is what the Russian military observed in Operation Desert Storm and Kosovo and they have long since taken Kosovo as a template for a potential future attack on Russia. As Celeste Wallander wrote at the time, Kosovo presented the following negative assessments of NATO enlargement:

For Russia, all the hypothetical security concerns of the past decade are the threats of today. NATO is now closer to Russian borders, and is bombing a non-NATO state. Even before NATO's new strategic concept, the Alliance's development of Combined Joint Task Forces offered ways for the alliance to employ forces outside the constraints of Article 5 (self-defense).

NATO's changes, combined with its determination to use force against nonmembers threatens Russia because political turmoil in the former Soviet Union increases the likelihood of NATO involvement near and perhaps even in Russia. Moscow has long feared that expansion of the Alliance could radicalize or destabilize neighboring countries, sparking internal splits or civil wars that could drag in Russia—a role it neither wants nor can afford.

Unfortunately, NATO-Russia cooperation failed to address these concerns even before Kosovo. After Kosovo, it is difficult to see what kind of cooperative relationship NATO and Russia can have. For one thing, the air strikes, as viewed from Russia, violated several principles of the NATO-Russia Founding Act—primarily NATO's commitments to limit its right to use force and promising the settlement of disputes by peaceful means.

Russians interpret the ongoing military campaign absent U.N. Security Council approval as NATO's drive for unilateral security in Europe. NATO's new Strategic Concept adopted

at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary expanded the Alliance's mission to include non-NATO Europe as a potential area for further NATO use of force. While the Concept recognizes the role of the U.N. Security Council, it does not require that NATO obtain U.N. mandate for actions beyond the Alliance's border.<sup>203</sup>

Accordingly the main military threat is the integrated aerospace operation with conventional high-precision weapons to knock out Russian air defenses, C3I and nuclear capability, leaving the country defenseless to aerial and subsequent missile, naval and ground operations.<sup>204</sup> The result is what scholars have called the IADS. This network exhibits the Russian interest in joint operations and builds upon Soviet thinking and experience plus new technologies and insights about post 1990-Western operations to create a comprehensive network ranging from the sea and ground to space to deny the West the capability to conduct precision strike at short-range or long-range. It takes a page out of Sun Tzu's recommendation to target the adversary's strategy, for Moscow knows NATO relied precisely upon this kind of operation to establish superiority in the theater.

Russian air defenses will also integrate EW and anti-satellite weapons, which Moscow is now building, apparently in collaboration with China to degrade allied communications and ISR.<sup>205</sup>

Russian writings on the conduct of operations and tactical engagements emphasize the importance of the long-range fires contest. Russia's military can employ overwhelming firepower against any of the country's neighbors, and Russia has invested heavily in ISR capabilities to mass fires quickly and effectively. Russia's strategic, operational, and tactical air defenses would pose challenges to its adversaries' air operations and joint air-ground integration.

Russian ground forces are typically heavily defended with air defense systems rather than by air support; in a situation of mutual air denial, Russian ground units would most likely be a substantial advantage derived from their numerical superiority in ground-based fire support.<sup>206</sup> Again Russian views are consistent. They believe the advantage in modern warfare goes to the side that can gain and sustain fire superiority over the adversary, and in some scenarios they would likely feel compelled to attack to secure that advantage.<sup>207</sup>

The anti-air operation has discernible features.

Russian forces would aim to disorient the adversary and prevent it from operating in its preferred fashion. Many of their efforts – including the emphasis on deception, electronic warfare, and strikes against command and communications – are intended to disrupt adversaries and slow their ability to respond to developments on the battlefield. This plays into the Russian emphasis on layered air defense and ground-based fires.

The combination of a layered IADS and a variety of ground-based indirect fire systems is intended to pose a significant joint and combined arms-integration challenge to adversaries. The IADS complicates the ability of an adversary to employ air-delivered fires against Russian forces, and the considerable artillery and missile forces available are intended to allow Russia to gain and leverage superiority in fires on the ground.<sup>208</sup>

Inasmuch as Allied pilots have experienced nothing like Russia's IADS or EW in the last decade and a half and Russia is constantly refining the lessons it has learned in Ukraine and Syria, it is



clear that Western concepts of future combat and forces are either out of date or at risk from Russia's capabilities that are acknowledged to outstrip Western EW capabilities.<sup>209</sup>

We should not think that this anti-air operation and IADS only applies to ground combat or the Baltic. Russia is doing the same thing in regards to naval warfare; its diplomacy and military operations in Syria are intended to extend the perimeters of this IADS to deny NATO access to the Black Sea and to contest the Eastern Mediterranean. The recent announcements about Russian air and naval bases in Egypt and Sudan impel us to realize that across the Middle East and Eurasia, the Russian Federation pursues a deliberate strategy to negate Western military capabilities while ensuring the expansion of Russian power in all its forms.

These recent announcements about an agreement to share air space in each country, the acquisition of an air base in Egypt and the concurrent discussions with Sudan for a naval base on the Red Sea coast highlight the range of Moscow's objectives, the capabilities it can increasingly bring to bear in pursuit of those goals and conversely Western strategic failure.<sup>210</sup> Air bases in Egypt and the use of Egyptian air space, along with a projected use of a Sudanese base on the Red Sea coast, allows Russia to expand its A2AD bubbles from the Arctic, Baltic, and Black Seas, the Caucasus and Central Asia regions into the Middle East. It now has naval and air bases in Syria and is angling for another naval base in Egypt; while potentially seeking access to naval facilities and naval and air bases at Cyprus, Libya, and Yemen; and it already has potential access to a base in Iran.

Moscow will undoubtedly use its Egyptian air base to strike at anti-Russian factions backed by the West in Libya. For the first time, it now has direct reconnaissance over Israeli air space and increasing leverage through its Egyptian and Syrian air bases on Israel, something Israel has sought to reject since its inception as a state. In addition to the projected base in Sudan, Russia now has the capability to strike at Saudi targets as well.

But the dimensions of Moscow's achievement go further. These bases register Russian military and political influence throughout the region. Moscow will now have strike and/or ISR capabilities across the entire Middle East. In practical terms this means that the bases in Syria, Egypt, and probably in Iran give it the capability to project power across the entire breadth and length of the Middle East. Meanwhile, Russia will probably deploy its fire-strike weapons and integrated air defenses across these bases.

Should Moscow outfit these naval and air bases with UAV, UCAV, UUV, EW, and ISTAR capabilities and long-range cruise missiles, as is likely, Russia could then contest Western aerospace superiority throughout the atmosphere over these areas. Moscow would be able to contest the entire Eastern Mediterranean. With the ability to contest the entire Mediterranean, Moscow will place NATO land, air, and/or naval forces at risk.

The bases in Sudan and Egypt will also have a similar effect in regards to the Suez Canal and Red Sea if not the Persian Gulf's western reaches. Meanwhile Moscow probably still has the potential to recover the use of an Iranian base as it had at Hamdan and is seeking another one in Yemen as it had in Soviet times at Socotra. If those new bases come into play and Moscow can deploy its long-range strike capabilities and integrated air defense network there as it has done at its already existing bases, then it will have coverage of the Mediterranean, Black Sea, Caucasus, and Central

Asia that would make any Western operation in any of those theaters extremely hazardous and costly.

Given the existing bases in the Black Sea, Caucasus, and the Levant, Turkey is already almost totally surrounded, and Balkan states and Italy could be vulnerable as well. Russia is attempting to create what Marshal Ogarkov once called a “reconnaissance-strike complex” across the Mediterranean, Red Sea, Suez Canal, Caucasus, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf. This is not only an issue of challenging the West’s reliance on an aerospace precision-fire strike in the first days of any war and thus Western and American air superiority. These capabilities also threaten international energy supplies because Moscow can then use the threat of its naval and/or air power in the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Suez Canal, and Mediterranean to interdict or curtail energy supplies that traverse these waterways.

Moscow’s investment in EW is also growing and it may become a separate force within the Russian military if its commanders get their way.<sup>211</sup> Russian commanders see EW as a reasonably cheap investment compared to the cost of other weapons systems that is nonetheless a force multiplier for degrading enemy C4ISR and participating in the anti-air operation. EW is increasingly fully integrated into operations and an independent EW brigade was created in 2009 signaling that likely trend towards more such formations over time. Moreover,

Russia is actively developing a “total package” of EW systems to include a broad frequency range and other systems: these seem advanced and capable. In addition to such systems covering surveillance, protection, and countermeasures they cover measures to protect Russia’s own usage of the electromagnetic spectrum (EMS). The systems also offer countermeasures against “Western” civilian and magnetic usage of the EMS. Many of these Russian EW systems are highly mobile, including small systems deployable by UAVs, making targeting and neutralizing them more complex and challenging.<sup>212</sup>

Given Russian superiority in ground forces and artillery – a traditional strength – through massed indirect fires by ground, air, and naval-based systems, it is clear that NATO at present would be hard pressed to defend the Baltic and even possibly the Balkans or Eastern Mediterranean in the initial phases of a war.<sup>213</sup>

This is not an exaggeration. A recent analysis of the battles fought by the Russian army against Ukraine in 2014-15 before the Minsk II accords were signed suggests that the Russians, especially at the battle of Zelenopillya, “have broken the code on reconnaissance-strike complex, at least at the tactical and operational level.”<sup>214</sup> This battle highlighted Russian proficiency in the tactical employment of EW and cyber attacks and integrating those forms of warfare with conventional targeting capabilities to enhance the latter. Furthermore Russia spurned the use of joint forces thereby quickening the pace between reconnaissance and fire strikes and they also demonstrated that Russia preferred intense area fire coverage rather than precision strikes.<sup>215</sup>

Russia’s tactical, operational, and strategic innovations and the dynamic synergies they provide for Moscow are also tied to the dynamic process of rethinking contemporary war carried out by the General Staff and Ministry of Defense under centralized political leadership and “hot” production lines. They highlight the importance of the unity of theory and practice in Russian

defense strategy and policy and stand as glaring contrasts to Western confusion, which betrays the lack of this unity of theory and practice.<sup>216</sup> Thus,

Russia has woven its political and military objectives together and is utilizing all of the instruments of national power to pursue those objectives. At the operational level, Russia is blending the use of force into a multi-domain approach that uses conventional, unconventional, cyber, information, and electronic warfare in a synergistic effort to overwhelm an opponent's capacity to handle the quantity of presented dilemmas. At the tactical level, Russia has reorganized its ground forces into robust, highly integrated combined arms formations capable of finding the opponent, bringing vast amounts of firepower to bear in time and space to pulverize the opponent, and then rapidly exploit with conventional ground forces.<sup>217</sup>

When one juxtaposes these ground forces developments with what we now see transpiring in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East with regard to a naval closed sea, we begin to see the full meaning of A2AD strategies and the operational costs that await NATO unless it starts thinking better and deploying credible forces in both number and quality to support a strong strategy, theory of victory, and operational art. Indeed, if Russia or other adversaries' kinetic and non-kinetic capabilities are functioning synergistically at the strategic level, even if it is latent of kinetic means can suffice to check a strategic superior power from considering entering into the adversary's strategic space. Or as Sam Tangredi writes, "Using nonkinetic means, the anti-access force potentially can check the strategically superior power. That is what anti-access strategies are all about."<sup>218</sup> Moreover, Russia's approach to nuclear weapons further aggravates our problems.

## Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear War

Although Russia does not have an advantage in the nature of nuclear weapons even though it is modernizing its arsenal and has broken virtually every arms control treaty in existence, the real advantage it has is in the innovations which have married thought to procurement and deployment and the ensuing nuclear element of its overall strategy. As Dmitry Adamsky observes, "The nuclear component is an inseparable part of Russian operational art that cannot be analyzed as a stand-alone issue". This is because it abets Russian conventional threats and aggression through the deterrence of adversaries' counteraction to that aggression.<sup>219</sup> Similarly, Major Amos Fox writes that the strategic defense provided by Russian nuclear weapons and the IADS facilitate the attainment of all of Russia's conventional warfare objectives: deterring NATO expansion into Russia's historic sphere of influence, retaining regional hegemony in Eurasia and demonstrating improvements to Russian military capabilities.<sup>220</sup> That much is obvious. But beyond that,

The presence of nuclear weapons is perhaps the first critical component for modern hybrid warfare. Nuclear weapons provide insurance against a massive ground response to an incremental limited war. The offensive nation that possesses nuclear weapons knows that the adversary or its allies will not likely commit large ground forces to a conflict for fear of the aggressor employing those weapons against ground [or naval-SB] forces. This dynamic emboldens the aggressor nation. In the case of Russia, its possession of nuclear weapons emboldens leaders to take offensive action because they know that even the threat of nuclear employment forces potential adversaries to a standstill.<sup>221</sup>

We see this coming true in Moscow's behavior and apparent nuclear strategy. This is because the document detailing that strategy and conditions for nuclear use is classified and its doctrinal statements are hardly revealing. To say that nuclear weapons might be used in a first strike if there is a vital threat to the state's survival is hardly revelatory for any nuclear power, especially one haunted by the real spectre of state disintegration and who cannot afford to lose any war that it engages in. But Russia's "nuclear behaviour" is sufficient grounds for real anxiety. As Colin Gray observes, despite the fact that there is no sign of Russian discourse coming true concerning the use of a nuclear weapon to defeat NATO in limited nuclear scenarios, Moscow talks as if it can achieve this outcome. Thus he writes,

In a manner that is ominously reminiscent of Adolf Hitler, Putin and others have chosen to introduce explicitly ruthless threats, including nuclear threats, into Russian reasoning about acute international crises. They hypothesize about the high political value that would accrue as a result of nuclear use on a limited scale. The hoop, apparently, is that the NATO enemy, certainly the less robust members, at least, would be out-gunned either by the actuality, or more likely only by the credible threat of nuclear.<sup>222</sup>

Not surprisingly, for Gray the inescapable conclusion is that Russia seeks escalation dominance.

In the language of now-classic strategic theory from a past generation of theorists, the Russians currently are talking with apparent seriousness about *nuclear escalation dominance*. Russian theorists claim, perhaps expect, they could win a war wherein Russia employs nuclear weapons on a very modest scale. This expectation follows from a Russian belief that Moscow's employment of a few nuclear weapons would give them a decisive coercive edge in the diplomacy that should follow. Russian authors have advised us ironically that the use of these weapons would prove to be a decisive de-escalatory move – de-escalatory because NATO would be expected to capitulate. The high determination shown unmistakably by the fact of Russian nuclear use would surprise, even shock, audiences politically around the world. Thus with unmatched boldness Russia should achieve a considerable political, perhaps even military, victory.<sup>223</sup>

While no such scenario has yet occurred nor is it immediately likely it does show not just the brazenness but equally, if not more importantly, it shows how nuclear scenarios are intertwined with conventional wars. Arguably there is a seamless web from conventional scenarios leading up to and including supposedly limited nuclear war scenarios perhaps using tactical nuclear weapons for which the West as yet has found no response.<sup>224</sup> Or as Finnish LTC Pertti Forsstrom argues,

In this way the content of traditional strategic deterrence is broadened to cover both Russian nuclear and conventional assets. On the other hand, the abolishment of the restrictions for the use of nuclear weapons means that the dividing line between waging war with conventional or with nuclear weapons is vanishing. When the principle of surprise is connected to this idea, it seems that Russia wants to indicate that non-strategic nuclear weapons could be regarded as "normal" assets on a conventional battlefield. This is the basis upon which Russia regulates the level of deterrence for example in the Kaliningrad exclave. By introducing the concept of pre-emptive strike to its military means, Russia is trying to enhance its non-nuclear deterrence even further.<sup>225</sup>

And when one looks at Russian nuclear procurement in the present and as intended through 2025 if not later than this inextricability of nuclear weapons with Russia's war strategy becomes even clearer.

Nuclear weapons represent important, even critical, parts of Putin's so called asymmetric or indirect strategy and of what U.S. analysts call Putin's hybrid war strategy. Their continuing procurement is unceasing. These sectors are critical not only because they are procurement priorities but also because until recently Russia clearly envisaged fighting a limited nuclear war and may still think in terms of doing so.

It is true that Russia's most recent military doctrines suggest a move towards greater reliance on what might be called non-nuclear or conventional deterrence.<sup>226</sup> But its procurement programs and exercises like the recent Zapad-2017 exercise point to an entirely different conclusion, namely anticipation of actual nuclear war-fighting. Therefore the controversy over the role of nuclear weapons in Russian strategy and the question of whether or not Russia has a high or low threshold for nuclear use remains unresolved.<sup>227</sup>

Nevertheless the worst aspect of these deployments and plans is that they highlight the General Staff and government's strategy as still being one of supposedly limited nuclear war. Previously key officials confirmed this interpretation, conceding limited nuclear war as Russia's officially acknowledged strategy against many different kinds of contingencies.<sup>228</sup> The correspondent Ilya Kedrov, in his 2010 discussion of armored vehicles, also ratified his understanding of the doctrine as affirming this strategy.<sup>229</sup> Likewise, Colonel-General Nikolai Solovtsov, Commander in Chief of the Strategic Missile (Rocket) Forces, stated in 2008 that new military uses for nuclear weapons are coming into being. Thus,

The radical changes that have occurred since the end of the Cold War in international relations and the considerable reduction of the threat that a large-scale war, even more so a nuclear one, could be unleashed, have contributed to the fact that in the system of views on the role of nuclear arms both in Russia and the U.S, a political rather than military function has begun to prevail. In relation to this, besides the traditional forms and methods in the combat use of the RVSN, a new notion of "special actions" by the groupings of strategic offensive arms has emerged. Such actions mean the RVSN's containment actions, their aim to prevent the escalation of a high-intensity non-nuclear military conflict against the Russian Federation and its allies.<sup>230</sup>

At a September 2008 roundtable on nuclear deterrence, Solovtsov noted that Russia was giving explicit consideration to the concept of "special actions" or "detering actions of the RVSN aimed at the prevention of escalation of a non-nuclear military conflict of high intensity against Russia." Solovtsov further stated that,

These actions may be taken with a view to convincingly demonstrate to the aggressor [the] high combat potential of Russian nuclear missile weapons, [the] determination of the military-political leadership of Russia to apply them in order to make the aggressor stop combat actions In view of its unique properties, the striking power of the Strategic Missile Forces is most efficient and convincing in the de-escalation actions.<sup>231</sup>

Whatever changes have occurred since then in actual operational planning, nuclear weapons remain Russia's priority procurement program item and new models are being developed with hypersonic capabilities even as Russia is also modernizing older systems. And the extent of these programs far outstrips current U.S. modernization.<sup>232</sup> Indeed, Russian officials, e.g. Viktor Bondarev, head of the Federation Council Defense and Security Committee, not only see no threat from recent U.S. nuclear exercises, but Bondarev actually claims that "Russia's nuclear potential is significantly superior to America's."<sup>233</sup>

Since the late 1990s, Russia has developed and deployed: two new types of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), including a new road-mobile missile and a silo-based variant (Topol-M Variant 2 and Yars); a new type of sea-launched ballistic missile (SLBM), the Bulava-30, and two upgraded versions of an existing SLBM (Sineva and Liner); a new class of ballistic missile submarine (Borey); modernized heavy bombers, including the Tu-160 (Blackjack) and Tu-95 (Bear); and a new long-range strategic cruise missile (Raduga). Russia is also developing additional strategic nuclear weapons systems, including: a new road-mobile ICBM (Rubezh) and a new rail-mobile ICBM (Barguzin); a new heavy ICBM (Sarmat) with multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs); a new "fifth generation" missile submarine to carry ballistic and cruise missiles; and a new stealthy heavy bomber to carry cruise missiles and reportedly hypersonic missiles.<sup>234</sup>

Despite Moscow's professed interest in new arms control treaties, this is not the program of a state seeking disarmament. Furthermore Moscow has long sought and is continuing to test weapons whose explicit purpose is to evade U.S. missile defenses which it continues to regard, in defiance of all science and innumerable Western briefings, as a major threat to its second-strike capability. In September 2017 Moscow tested both the road-mobile and silo-based versions of the RS-24 Yars solid-fuel ICBM in conjunction with the Zapad-2017 exercises, using "experimental warheads."<sup>235</sup>

In addition, Russia has recently announced that it will soon test a new generation of ICBMs that "can beat US defense systems" and hold the U.S. and Europe at risk. The new Sarmat, or Satan-2, RS-28 ICBM can allegedly destroy an area the size of Texas or France, evade missile defenses and do so using hypersonic Multiple Independent Reentry Vehicles that are now permitted under the New START treaty. The hypersonic missiles that allegedly can be fitted to this system are currently in development under the title Project 4202, a label that evidently refers to the hypersonic glide vehicle, the Yu-71.<sup>236</sup> Russian sources claim an 11,000 kilometers range and up to 15 warheads for this weapon, a yield of up to 760 kilotons and the building of launch silos that could withstand seven nuclear strikes.<sup>237</sup>

Russian nuclear modernization programs also encompass all three legs of its triad of air, sea, and land-based nuclear weapons as well as short, intermediate, and long-range nuclear weapons. According to General Paul Selva, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Russia is also developing new tactical nuclear weapons.<sup>238</sup> Thus it can tailor its forces to any number of contingencies. And that is only one of over 20 Russian programs currently underway to manufacture and deploy nuclear weapons. These include a heavy ICBM, new bombers and new SLBMs and missile submarines.<sup>239</sup> In addition, in October 2017 Putin took the unusual step of publicly announcing his personal participation in a nuclear exercise using all three elements of Russia's nuclear triad and some of the newest models of Russian air, land and sea-launched nuclear weapons.<sup>240</sup>

Putin also highlighted Russia's ongoing militarization by announcing that over 2,500 military exercises had occurred in 2017.<sup>241</sup> Moreover, given current procurement plans and the counting rules under the New START Treaty Russia could actually increase its nuclear weapons and still be in compliance.<sup>242</sup> Finally, all conventional plans and exercises have an accompanying nuclear component, so nuclear options are integrated into operational plans and rehearsed beforehand. Submarine-based nuclear strikes from the Arctic accompanied the recent Zapad 2017 exercises as did much less heralded nuclear exercises in Novosibirsk involving some of the newest nuclear weapons in Moscow's arsenal.<sup>243</sup> And this followed a pattern of coinciding nuclear and conventional exercises for Zapad 2009 and 2013.<sup>244</sup>

Thus we can safely say that Russia's concept and program for nuclear weapons presents it with an apparent advantage over the U.S. As Mark Schneider writes,

Contrary to popular belief, the United States does not enjoy nuclear parity with Russia. In fact, Russia has nuclear superiority. The illusion of nuclear parity is created by: 1) comparing the Russian active stockpile with the U.S. active and inactive stockpiles, 2) ignoring the 10-1 Russian advantage in tactical nuclear weapons, 3) dismissing the modernization asymmetry, 4) disregarding the massive Russian advantage in nuclear weapons production capability, and 5) ignoring operating practices that keep relatively more Russian warheads on alert than American.<sup>245</sup>

Russian political and military figures not only invoke the likelihood of nuclear responses to conventional attacks, they also raise the prospect of preemptive and/or preventive nuclear strikes and freely make nuclear threats against any state "rash enough" to join NATO if it is neutral like Sweden or that is willing to increase its defense effort like Denmark.<sup>246</sup>

Moscow is also developing low-yield high precision nuclear weapons and when it refers to high-precision weapons it does not specify whether they are conventional or nuclear because many systems like the Iskander missile and all fighter-bomber units are dual-capable.<sup>247</sup> Its tactical nuclear weapons are apparently intended to be used both to compensate for conventional capabilities that may be lacking and to respond to conventional strikes.<sup>248</sup> In other words, tactical, if not other, nuclear weapons will be used in a first-strike mode. And in exercises in Europe, Asia, and the Indian Ocean that is exactly what we have seen.<sup>249</sup>

In preparation for nuclear war scenarios Moscow also has deployed the new SARMAT heavy ICBM that possesses 10 metric tons of throw-weight and will reportedly carry to heavy and 15 medium warheads. Its launch weight is about 170 tons and its destructive potential is 8 megatons and will clearly be Moscow's main counterforce weapon.<sup>250</sup> Similarly Moscow is also building the "Maritime Multifunctional System Status-6" a nuclear armed, high-speed 10,000 km range weapon that could operate at a depth of 1000 meters and reportedly carries a 10-megaton weapon. Its only conceivable purpose is massive countervalue slaughter.<sup>251</sup>

More recently Pentagon sources and experts like Schneider and James Howe estimated that at current rates by 2026 Russia will deploy 8,000 warheads while also modernizing deep nuclear bunkers. This total reflects certain trends beyond what we have noted above. First, at current procurement rates, Russia will reach the New START treaty limits during 2018 and is likely to break the treaty as it has broken every other arms control treaty in the last generation. This 8,000-

weapon arsenal includes large, low and very low-yield strategic warheads. The assessment also follows our argument by saying that Russia plans to blend conventional forces with nuclear ones in future conflicts. The smaller yield warheads will thus be deployed on new short and medium or intermediate-range missiles like the SSC-8 cruise missile and the SSN-27 Kalibr anti-ship land attack cruise missile. These new very low-yield weapons include clean weapons with little fallout, pure fusion weapons that do not require a nuclear blast to trigger them and tailored effects weapons such as neutron bombs, electromagnetic pulse blasts and x-ray and gamma ray weapons.<sup>252</sup>

Russia has systematically violated every arms control treaty except the New Start Treaty. These treaties include the INF and CFE treaties, the Vienna Note on conventional exercises and deployments, and the treaty prohibiting emplacement of nuclear weapons on the ocean floor. Indeed, according to Mark Schneider “we now have *four* different Russian ground-launched cruise missiles, two revealed in U.S. government sources and two reported in both the Russian and Western press, which have reported ranges that violate the INF Treaty.”<sup>253</sup>

These systematic violations of arms control treaties clearly aim to give Russia advantages vis-à-vis the U.S. in nuclear statecraft. But if the strategy is one of escalation dominance, it is also clear that based on its procurements Moscow is aiming to reach a state where it can threaten nuclear strikes tailored to the occasion to retain escalation dominance, intimidate potential adversaries, and be able to wage what it thinks are limited conventional or limited nuclear wars with impunity.

## Space, Hypersonics, and Russian Fears of U.S. Systems

The development of space-based weapons and futuristic weapons based on “new physical principles” as well as the nuclear and conventional buildups all derive from Russian fears of Western and especially U.S. technological, economic, and military superiority. Therefore all these programs are intended to offset those forms of Western superiority. Here are areas where Moscow fears that the West has superiority and is duly striving to overcome or compensate for it. Those systems that Moscow fears most are the U.S. missile defense program in Europe and Asia, conventional program for global strikes, and Western designs on the Arctic.

Consequently weapons programs aim to deny the U.S. the utility of the missile defense network or the ability to launch global conventional strikes without suffering heavy losses. In the non-kinetic field, it has long been the case that Moscow deeply believes that the U.S. and Europe are waging information warfare against it to undermine the Putin system of governance even though there is no intention or desire by the U.S. government to do that. Moreover there is no information warfare strategy and no strategy to counter Russian IW attacks like what we saw in 2016 because President Trump has blocked any discussion of this issue. Likewise, as we have indicated above the missile defense system and the CPGS program either cannot threaten Russian nuclear missiles or in the case of the CPGS issue the program does not exist and the capabilities are not there.

While Russia is clearly developing anti-satellite and other space weapons as well as hypersonics it is not clear that it possesses an advantage over the U.S. Russia tested an anti-satellite weapon in 2016 and recently announced it is building one.<sup>254</sup> Indeed, the list of current Russian nuclear programs includes some hypersonic weapons systems, such as a new stealthy heavy bomber that will carry cruise missiles and reportedly hypersonic missiles. But in addition the Project 4202 vehicle that is to be delivered by the SS-19 Stiletto missile is also intended to be hypersonic.<sup>255</sup>



Hypersonic vehicles or alternatively boost-glide vehicles travel at speeds between Mach 5 and Mach 10 (3840/MPH to 7680MPH) use sophisticated technologies for maneuvering and boost that allow them to deliver warheads rapidly, evade defenses and target precisely. This allows for high rates of survivability against missile defense systems. These qualities excite Russian designers and planners because Moscow fully believes that the U.S. ballistic missile defense system now being built in Europe and Asia aims, despite all abundant evidence to the contrary, to neutralize Russia's nuclear strike capability against Europe and the U.S. This explains the obsession of Russian leaders is to build supposedly invulnerable nuclear weapons like hypersonic that cannot be attacked by missile defenses.<sup>256</sup>

Development of such weapons goes a long way towards confirming that Moscow wants to hold the U.S. at risk of nuclear strikes and sees military utility in nuclear weapons as warfighting instruments. The 2015 tests of the Project 4202 weapon comprised of what Russia calls the Yu-71 hypersonic attack aircraft that supposedly could reach speeds of 7,000/MPH. It also can be used not just as a warhead for the SS-X-30 (Sarmat) but also can be adapted for the Russia's advanced long-range strategic bomber.<sup>257</sup> But in 2016 Moscow apparently tested the Yu-74 hypersonic attack aircraft, evidently carried by the SS-19 Stiletto ballistic missile system.

Evidently these gliders are to be loaded onto the new Sarmat or SS-X-30 state of the art ICBM that can carry up to 24 nuclear loaded Yu-74 gliders and can hit any target with a 6200-mile radius in an hour.<sup>258</sup> Each Yu-74 glider can be equipped with a nuclear warhead and/or EW application or false target simulators to ensure penetration of any missile defense system and thus significantly raise the efficiency of Russia's Strategic Missile Forces.<sup>259</sup> The search for missile penetration systems to break through any missile defense by means of the use of new kinds of weapons with hypermodern technologies for maneuverability also helps explain the modernization of old systems like the SS-19 Stiletto that can serve as launchers for these warheads.

But beyond deploying weapons with missile penetration capabilities, Russia is also clearly not just MIRVing its weapons it is also building medium or heavy-class weapons because the New START treaty does not impose any penalties or prohibitions for doing so unlike START-1.<sup>260</sup> Moreover, these plans for countering the U.S. BMD program go back at least to 2004 when that program was just announced and are clearly part of the asymmetric procurement strategy devised already at that time by Putin. They must be regarded as part of the confluence of events leading to Sergei Ivanov's declaration that Russia was at war in 2005.<sup>261</sup> As the late Alexander Pikayev wrote in 2008,

Russia declared that it would undertake effective "asymmetric" counter-measures in order to reduce this threat and to make the strategic situation more stable. One of these measures is to target the elements of the ABM system in Europe with Russian strategic missiles. Alongside with this, some experts and even military officials, including Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, General Yuri Baluevsky, made rather straightforward statements about the possibility that Russia would withdraw from the INF treaty as a reaction and counter-measure to the deployment of an American ABM system in Europe.<sup>262</sup>

Meanwhile allegedly the project to create hypersonic air-launched cruise missiles (ALCM) that are quite similar to the Yu-74 is also entering its final phase.<sup>263</sup> Lastly,

Ostkraft analysts emphasize that the Yu-74 gliders would not only evade NATO's missile defense systems but will be also capable of penetrating through the U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) shield. The analysts argue that while the THAAD system is effective in intercepting outdated R-17 Elbrus tactical ballistic missiles, it is potentially vulnerable to the threat posed by advanced missile systems.<sup>264</sup>

Of course, if that is really the truth and Moscow can breach THAAD then it remains a mystery why Moscow and Beijing are so upset that South Korea, which clearly faces a serious missile and nuclear threat from North Korea, opted to join the U.S. THAAD network.<sup>265</sup> In addition if Moscow really does possess this capability then why is it so agitated about the U.S. developing and deploying THAAD in Japan and South Korea? Similarly, keeping with the idea that nuclear and futuristic weapons are regarded as much for their power to intimidate as for their actual capabilities, it is not unusual to encounter statements of this kind in the Russian media even as Moscow endlessly fulminates that it is under threat from the U.S. and its allies. Indeed, the following statement tangibly manifests the combination of overcompensation and groundless boasting to intimidate on one hand with ingrained paranoia of the Russian leadership on the other.

The Russian military are about to test the first prototypes of the S-500 Prometey air and missile defense system also known as 55R6M Triumfator M capable of destroying ICBMs, hypersonic cruise missiles, and planes at over Mach 5 speeds; and capable of detecting and simultaneously attacking up to ten ballistic missile warheads at a range of 1300KM. This means the S-500 can smash ballistic missiles before their warheads re-enter the atmosphere. So in the case of RAND-style NATO pussyfooting, the S-500 would totally eliminate all NATO air power over the Baltic States while the advanced Kornet missile would destroy all NATO armored vehicles. And that's not even considering conventional weapon hell.

If push came to nuclear shove, the S-400 and especially the S-500 anti-missile missiles would block all incoming U.S. ICBM's, cruise missiles, and stealth aircraft. Offensive drones would be blocked by drone defenses. The S-500 practically consigns into the dustbin stealth warplanes such as the F-22, F-35, and the B-2. The bottom line is that Russia – in terms of hypersonic missile development – is about four generations ahead of the U.S, if we measure it by the development of the S-300, S-400, and S-500 systems.

As a working hypothesis, we could describe the next system – already in the drawing boards – as the S-600. It would take the U.S. military at least ten years to develop and roll out a new weapons system, which in military terms represents a generation. Every Pentagon planner worth his pension plan should know that. Russian – and Chinese – missiles are already able to knock out the satellite guidance systems for U.S. nuclear tipped ICBMs and cruise missiles. They could also knock out the early alert warnings that the satellite constellations would give.

A Russian hypersonic ICBM flight time, launched for instance from a Russian nuclear sub all the way to the U.S. East Coast, counts for less than 20 minutes. So an early warning system is absolutely critical. Don't count on the worthless THAAD and Patriot to do their job. Once again Russian hypersonic technology has already rendered the entire missile defense system in both the U.S. and Europe totally obsolete. So why is Moscow so worried

by the Pentagon placing the Aegis system so close to Russia's borders? A credible answer is that Moscow is always concerned that the U.S. industrial-military complex might develop some really effective anti-missile missiles even though they are now about four generations behind.<sup>266</sup>

This long citation graphically combines the mendacity common to Russian propaganda with the paranoia that pervades the government and IW activity but also epitomizes the use of false information about Russian military that is disseminated precisely to intimidate or impress foreign audiences. It graphically reveals the cultural and institutional inclination to assuming that worst-case scenarios are real.

The actual state of affairs is quite different except for the paranoia. Since Moscow believes it is at war and would not hesitate to strike offensively if it could successfully do so it projects that ambition onto its presumed adversary. Moscow's invests in hypersonics not just because the U.S. and China are doing so as well but because the capabilities that the U.S. and presumably China are now developing frighten Russia to no end. Specifically, Moscow knows it has no real defense against the U.S. CPGS program that is a purely conventional global strike capability from long-ranges using hypersonics and high-tech precision capabilities other than its IADS. The fact that the program has not materialized does not seem to have deterred it from investing billions to stop this threat and to proclaim that this kind of attack is likely to be the main and first strike of Western forces against Russia.<sup>267</sup>

It also fears that the BMD network now being built in Europe and Asia, including THAAD, can neutralize its first-strike nuclear capability despite laws of physics and abundant U.S. briefings to the contrary. If both these programs are used together Moscow believes Washington could decapitate its C3I by conventional means while the BMD system neutralizes any hope of a retaliatory nuclear strike.<sup>268</sup>

Statements by senior officials make Russia's fears and apprehensions clear. Special Envoy Grigory Beredennikov, in February 2015, not only denounced the U.S. missile defense program for upending deterrence because it would supposedly give Washington the illusion it could strike Russian nuclear systems or their C3I with conventional weapons and use the BMD network to neutralize a second strike, and thereby overcome the deterrence relationship between Moscow and Washington; he went further to reiterate that for Moscow strategic stability depends on a host of non-nuclear factors as well. Specifically he stated,

We are prepared for a dialogue about further nuclear disarmament steps. At the same time, we are convinced that they are impossible without solving such problems as the unlimited growth of global U.S. missile defenses, the project of using strategic weapons with conventional warheads within the concept of "global strike" – the refusal of the United States to pledge not to deploy weapons in space, [and] the growth of qualitative and quantitative conventional imbalances.<sup>269</sup>

This is why Moscow constantly inveighs against BMD in Europe, the CPGS, and U.S. hypersonic programs, all of which, individually, or taken together, would explode strategic stability as Moscow defines it.<sup>270</sup> As Amy Woolf of the Congressional Research Service observes,

Russian officials have expressed a number of concerns about U.S. conventional prompt global strike capabilities and their implications for strategic stability. They have argued that these weapons, even if armed with conventional warheads, could threaten critical targets in Russia and even threaten Russia's strategic nuclear forces if the United States deployed large numbers of missiles armed with highly accurate reentry vehicles.

This might provide the United States with the capability to undermine Russia's nuclear deterrent, without resorting to the first use of nuclear weapons, and might actually increase the likelihood of a U.S. attack against Russia. Moreover, even if Russia were not the target of an attack with these missiles, it might not know whether the missile carried a nuclear or conventional warhead, or whether it was headed towards a target in Russia. Finally, some Russians have argued that the United States might replace the conventional warheads with nuclear warheads to exceed the limits in a treaty.<sup>271</sup>

These Russian concerns are a major reason why beyond development of both nuclear and conventional hypersonic weapons like the projected sixth generation hypersonic fighter that will be both a hypersonic system and carry hypersonic missiles; Russia is also developing "next-generation" air defenses against the expected U.S. and/or NATO or Chinese hypersonics.<sup>272</sup> But even though Moscow is developing such defenses it is clear that its main thrust is to develop offensive strike capabilities that can threaten not just Europe but the continental U.S. and manifest a desire to use nuclear weapons as warfighting weapons, not just as deterrents against conventional or nuclear attack. This procurement policy, even if it is outrunning doctrinal efforts to regulate procurements in service of a coherent strategy has its own logic, as we have shown above, namely controlling escalation processes and dynamics through all phases of any crisis.

At the same time these investments reflect the healthy respect if not actual awe that Moscow has for U.S. and Western technological and economic capabilities even as it deprecates the West as a decadent civilization. This combination of paranoia, over-compensation and cognizance of backwardness and weakness is also on display in regard to the Arctic. Here, as noted above, Russia believes that Western governments are lusting after its energy and mineral resources to seize them in order to grab Russia's riches and dictate terms. This is the reason given behind the large-scale conventional and nuclear buildup of forces in the Arctic. While there is no such Western threat, the threat generated by these Russian capabilities is real but it can be met and rebuffed.

Apart from nuclear missiles based in the Murmansk and Kola area on board SLBMs the major threats from Russian naval and air forces in the Arctic are an invasion by Norway and the use of forces to project power into the Baltic Sea making it clear that any Baltic contingency is more than likely to become an Arctic one as well. At the same time the second arm of that latter threat is the simultaneous surge of Russian submarines, surface ships, and air forces into the North Atlantic to interdict the sea lines of communications SLOC and cut the transatlantic cables that communicate information and messages from the U.S. to the continent. This threat has recently been exposed as a major threat to NATO and steps are now underway from the reform of NATO's command structure to the integration of air and maritime defenses on both sides of the Atlantic as well as individual efforts by Norway in conjunction with the U.S.<sup>273</sup>

This latter threat requires a coordinated allied effort investing in anti-submarine warfare, air defense, offensive air capabilities, electronic warfare, and ISR capabilities to prevent this Russian

threat while missile defenses and ASW forces deal with the SLBM threat. That should be the priority in the North Atlantic and the Arctic for NATO and the U.S. Of course, conflict in the Baltic and Arctic requires a much wider range and quantitative as well as qualitative investment by NATO's members. But it is also clear that any enhancement of Western capabilities in the North Atlantic and Arctic will probably alarm Moscow considerably and lead it to divert resources to meet that threat despite the fact that it is highly doubtful anyone in NATO seeks to invade the Arctic.

## Conclusion

We are confronted by a Russian adversary not only in possession of new weapons but also with new tactics and innovative thinking about contemporary warfare. Therefore we must also disentrail ourselves and think anew about that subject. This requires more than new, advanced weapons as promised by the third offset strategy. And in any case Congressional unwillingness to spend what is needed to mount an effective defense of Europe inhibits that program and leaves without a really strategic approach to make up for the shortfall in expected or promised capabilities. That reluctance also manifests itself in Europe where too many still think that Europe is at peace and that if we could only get back to dialogues with Moscow we could refrain from the onerous challenges of self-defense.

Unfortunately, Europe is under attack whether it accepts it or not. And Putin's Russia is an implacable foe, i.e. one that cannot be placated, for it will regard dialogue as surrender and proof of its allegations concerning the West's lack of moral fiber. Moreover, war is inherent in Putin's project as is empire. And if we are at war a strategic response is necessary that utilizes all the instruments of power and deploys them wisely. An essential component of the process of formulating and then implementing the required strategy is to grasp Russia's tactics, *modus operandi*, operations, and strategy in Russian terms and understand the true nature of the war that has been forced upon us. Indeed, the process of disentrailment begins with understanding that unforeseen situation and the fact we face new challenges, not just a new version of the Cold War.

Therefore business as usual, as many recommend, is not an adequate reaction to our unexpected situation. Strategy, operations, force structures, tactics, and not least operational and strategic concepts as well as intelligence must be upgraded and adapted to contemporary requirements. That also means repairing broken national security policy structure so that we can bring to bear the full weight of state capacity upon our strategic challenges. All this must be a dynamic process with constant readjustment given the dynamic nature of our time. This is a heady task for any government but we all understand that today the world has no good alternative to American leadership."<sup>274</sup>

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