

FOREWORD

CIDOB and The Institute for Statecraft are pleased to publish this report addressing Russia's strategy towards the Southern and Eastern borders of Europe.

The growing assertiveness of the Kremlin represents one of the main challenges for NATO and the EU. Since the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent undeclared war in eastern Ukraine, we have witnessed increasing military tension in the Nordic-Baltic region; an increase in the projection of Russian power towards the Mediterranean - from Syria to Libya and with aspirations to strengthen their influence in Algeria- and; the growing, and increasingly well-documented, efforts of Russia to interfere in electoral processes and internal crises in some member states with the aim of undermining the legitimacy of their democratic systems. NATO and the EU are facing an actor willing to compete strategically and to confront them directly, now, both in their common neighbourhood and on the ideological and political level in each of their domestic contexts. NATO and the EU, meanwhile, are still only in the process of trying to build a sound strategy to deal with this and other key challenges.

The risk of disagreement and the consequent loss of a unified sense of purpose, between those NATO members who look to the East and those who are affected more by events in their southern neighbourhood is one of the main threats to the coherence of the Atlantic Alliance today. Both the southern and eastern flanks present serious risks and threats, but their nature could not be more different. The times in which the same doctrine and position could serve to address threats all fronts are gone forever. NATO needs to square this circle very quickly if it is not to be seriously damaged by the division, which its opponents are quick to exploit. Likewise, NATO must adapt and prepare itself for the sub-article 5 environment and multidimensional political warfare that it now faces, and will most certainly have to face in much greater measure during the coming decade. The threats may be more diffuse, their origins more uncertain, but their effects will not be less devastating. The international context is acutely and quickly transforming and the survival and success of each of the international actors will be determined, above all, by their ability to adapt. This report aims to stimulate debate in this crucial area, offering some useful ideas and elements to help improve analysis shared understanding among the Allies.

We would like to express our gratitude to the Public Diplomacy Division of NATO for its support in the organization of workshop held in Barcelona in January 26-27, 2017. This seminar gathered around the table for the first time some forty authoritative voices from the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods and from across NATO and the EU. This is no small milestone if we take into account that those who deal with the East rarely dialogue with those who deal with the South. This reality illustrates the problem NATO HQ has to deal with if it is to maintain the coherence and the internal consistency of the Alliance. The discussions held during two days of intense debate are the core of this report and of the research agenda that CIDOB and the Institute for Statecraft -two institutions that strive for accurate analysis and to contrast different perspectives- have shared during 2017.

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NATO and the EU are facing an increasingly uncertain and complex situation with overlapping crises on their eastern and southern borders. The aggressive military posture of the Kremlin represents one of the main challenges for NATO and the EU. Russia is showing a willingness to compete strategically and confront the two organisations directly, right now, both in their common neighbourhood and on the ideological and political level in their respective domestic contexts. NATO and the EU, meanwhile, are still in the process of trying to build a sound strategy to deal with such multidimensional political warfare.

When it comes to the Eastern and Southern flanks, NATO has, to date, favoured an approach which analyses the threats separately. Those who focus on the Mediterranean know little of Russia, while Russia and Eastern European experts know even less of the southern and eastern rim Mediterranean countries. Issues and interests are, however, increasingly cross-linked, if not intertwined. Yet NATO members have different perceptions, interests and therefore agendas which are linked to history and economics, possession or not of effective armies and energy dependence. These differences risk seriously fragmenting NATO's analysis.

As a result, perceptions of Russian behaviour differ significantly. With regard to NATO's Eastern flank, there is broad agreement that Russia is the major destabilising factor and a clear threat to some member states of NATO. But where Russian policy in the eastern and southern Mediterranean are concerned, views differ significantly. Some southern European countries, while fully committed to their obligations on NATO's Eastern flank, seem less worried than their northern European peers about Russia's renewed projection of power in Syria after an absence of two decades, let alone in Libya. Countries on the southern rim, notably Algeria - which is an important military power and energy supplier to Europe- are essentially on the same wavelength as Russia with regard to Syria. They also share Russian criticism of the manner in which events unfolded in Libya in 2011. In particular, Algeria was upset that its warning to leading Western capitals about the serious fallout that would

ensue from the demise of the Libyan leader, both in North Africa and the Sahel, were ignored.

The context on both flanks could not be more different. In the East, the lines of confrontation are clear. Russian behaviour has restored deterrence and collective defence as the Alliance's core purposes. Defining a clear strategy to counter hybrid warfare has begun, though it remains very much a work in progress. In the Mediterranean, however, NATO has yet to define an overarching structure to deal with the complex challenges the region presents, notably those related to governance issues and the strengthening of existing states.

Energy presents a further challenge: Russian gas supply to the EU offers the Kremlin leverage, which will only be increased if Nord Stream 2 is built. Meanwhile the four underwater gas pipelines which link Algeria (3) and Libya (1) to Europe are running more than half empty. NATO and the EU should develop their strategic dialogue with Algeria and Libya, both of which have huge reserves of oil, gas and shale. The EU meanwhile must continue to develop the gas connection between its members, notably that between Spain and France. Such policies would contribute to enhancing the EU's security of energy supply, rendering Europe less vulnerable to Russian pressure.

Eight papers by respected authors attempt to shed more light on these seriously complex issues and to suggest ways forward. The authors brought together here come from backgrounds which seldom allow them to exchange views. We think more work is needed on how the challenges from East and South can be assessed jointly and seen as one, allowing the creation of a more coherent overall strategy for NATO. Chris Donnelly's Epilogue offers the long view of someone well versed in the art of strategic planning.

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1. *All opinions are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the position or views of the institution he represents.*

The official phase of “Zapad-2017” – one of the biggest Russian-Belarusian military exercises in 2017 – is over. This exercise has been analysed by security pundits for months and indeed may have generated more international interest than any previous Russian exercise since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In fact, there was much speculation about how this exercise will change the regional dynamics and security situation. The aim of this article is to put “Zapad-2017” into a larger strategic perspective. How do the Russian armed forces train and what is the purpose of these drills? What has changed since the previous “Zapad” exercise which took place in 2013? What is there to watch during major Russian military exercises such as “Zapad-2017”?

There are *ten critical elements* that should be taken into consideration when assessing the Russian military exercises, and more broadly the Russian posture of force.

1) Russians train as they fight. This is a crucial element of the Russian exercising posture. In practical terms, this means that the Russian drills are based on a real threat assessment. The scenarios are realistic. They cover the opponents that exist and the military capabilities which match the reality.

“Zapad-2017” confirmed this trend. It evidenced that Russia has been practicing high-tempo, large-scale and deeply echeloned strategic offensive operations. In fact, this time Russia practiced a scenario based on the fast-forming of a joint strike force in the western strategic direction with the ability to launch military action against NATO’s eastern flank.

2) Since 2014 Russia has been directly engaged in two major conventional military conflicts in the vicinity of NATO. Both in the cases of Ukraine and Syria, Russian forces continue to test their military capabilities, chain of command, procedures and level of interoperability on the battlefield. These military operations have helped the Russian armed forces gain solid battlefield experience in a conventional conflict. “Zapad-2017” was yet another chance to verify the lessons learnt from both wars and eliminate existing gaps.

One area that the Russian General Staff paid close attention to was enhanced strategic mobility. Russian interest in this area has surged following Moscow's intervention in Syria, which necessitated the construction of air and sea lines of supply to support Russian forces during ongoing combat operations. This interest is also organic in nature, stemming from the reform of the military logistics system in 2010 and creation of the Material-Technical Support. The system, using improvements drawing on operational experience, was extensively tested in the "Kavkaz-2016" exercise last year.

In fact, "Zapad-2017" tried and tested the improvements to the Material-Technical Support based on the experience of supporting operations in Syria and addressed some of the weaknesses identified during previous exercises. Reportedly, since "Kavkaz-2016" a number of significant improvements have been introduced to facilitate faster and more efficient use of the Material-Technical Support. These include speeding up delivery of spare parts, improving interaction with the defence industry, and greatly aiding the speed of repair and maintenance for deployed units. This also involved linking the Material-Technical Support to automated systems, using improved diagnostic tools to identify problems, and integrating the work of the Material-Technical Support across strategic, operational and tactical levels.

The enhanced strategic mobility plays a crucial role in the Russian way of thinking about NATO's eastern flank. Many senior Russian officers appreciate that if conflict breaks out with NATO on Russia's periphery, speed of action, moving combat units, and denying the arrival of enemy follow-on forces will shape the outcome.

3) The Russian operational engagement gives us some initial sense of the offensive and defensive elements which were exercised during "Zapad-2017". Based on the observation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as well as the Russian operations in Syria one can assume that the following components were tested:

- substantial and integrated ground-based air defence, neutralising air support;
- extensive use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to exercise constant real-time surveillance;
- deployed electronic countermeasures suites to deny the use of UAVs by opposing forces;
- offensive electronic warfare capabilities;
- electronic and cyber-attacks, especially against any connected device brought into an operational area;
- swift targeting by concentrated artillery fire with advanced munitions, including from ranges beyond the reach of counter-battery fire;
- close coordination between signals intelligence (SIGINT), air defence, artillery and electronic warfare.

One of the critical elements in the Russian military operations remains artillery. In fact, in Russian military culture artillery is called the "God of War" and it remains the decisive finishing arm of the land forces. To stress the importance of artillery in the Russian formations, most Russian units have some indirect fire capability. Moreover, over the last years Russia has made vast improvements in its artillery capabilities,

which have been tested on a regular basis. Rocket artillery has a range of munitions that include high explosive fragmentary, top attack anti-armour munitions, as well as mine laying charges, thermobaric, chemical, and nuclear munitions.

4) "Zapad-2017" was of particular importance for the Russian Western and Southern Military Districts. They have become a top priority in the Russian military modernisation program since at least 2012. In practical terms this means that the units in both districts have received the most modern and technologically advanced equipment, which were put to the test in "Zapad-2017".

Since "Zapad-2013" the Russian formations in the western strategic direction have changed diametrically. In all types of troops and services, the potential for growth has mainly been achieved through extensive large-scale technical modernisation, but also the creation of new units and the expansion of those already existing. In fact, the Western Military District is currently hosting most of the tactical formations which have been newly created in recent years.

Since 2012 two new army headquarters have been created (the 1st Guards Tank Army in Moscow and the 8th Army in Novochoerkassk), as well as three army corps (the 11th in Kaliningrad, the 14th on the Kola Peninsula, and the 32nd in Crimea). The 8th Army and the 32nd Corps (both directed towards Ukraine) have received most of the newly created units. New divisions have also been deployed in the 20th Army (Voronezh). In total, between 2015 and 2017 four new divisions have been created: three mechanised (the 3rd, 144th and 150th in the western strategic direction, in the Western and Southern Military Districts) and one armoured (the 90th in the Central Military District). The Russian army's tactical formations have been systematically expanded up to wartime status. The newly created divisions each have four regiments of combat potential which are comparable to brigades, and additional regiments have also been created in the previously existing 2nd Mechanised Division and 4th Armoured Division of the 1st Guards Tank Army.

The nature and structure of the airborne troops have also been changed. Currently, they are de facto mechanised formations with increased capacity for rapid redeployment, with a destructive force comparable to the classic mechanised formations. Their capabilities will further increase after the tank companies, and ultimately tank battalions, are included in the air assault divisions and brigades. The newly created reconnaissance brigades, which combine various elements including electronic surveillance, enhanced the western strategic direction. As of June 2017, thirty battalion and company tactical groups from the Western Military District formations had the status of immediate response forces. Fifteen of them have also received the status of so-called shock subunits. Finally, in the first half of 2017 the Western Military District received 500 units of offensive heavy weapons, and another 500 units should reach those formations in the second half of the year.

In sum, the substantial changes in the Western Military District pose a direct challenge not only for NATO's eastern flank, but without a doubt for the whole Alliance.

5) Another key element of the modernisation of both military districts is the creation of the highly sophisticated Anti-Access/Area Denial systems (A2/AD). They encompass the necessary air power, maritime capabilities (including offensive mining), offensive and defensive missile systems – including Bastion (range: 450 km), Iskander (range: 500 km), Kalibr (range: 2500 km), and S-400 (range: 400 km) – offensive electronic warfare, cyber capabilities and information operations. The militarisation of the Kaliningrad Oblast and Crimea led to the creation of the so-called A2/AD bubbles right on NATO borders. Their main goal is to limit NATO's freedom of manoeuvring. In fact, currently, six capitals of NATO allies (Berlin, Copenhagen, Riga, Tallinn, Vilnius and Warsaw) are within the range of the missile systems stationed in the Kaliningrad Oblast. The recent deployment of Buyan-M class corvettes with nuclear-capable Kalibr missiles to the Kaliningrad Oblast changes this calculation and further enhances the A2/AD bubble. In "Zapad-2017" those systems were not only exercised, but in fact – and what is even more important – their level of integration was verified.

Russian doctrine places a great deal of emphasis on aerospace defence as a key component of its overall A2/AD strategy. Though still in development, Russia's 21st century integrated air defence systems will be designed to integrate future and existing systems around a central command structure that is designed to promote the interaction of all air defence forces and weapons. Moreover, Russia continues to develop a variety of sea- and aerospace-based programmes that offer a variety of offensive and defensive capabilities that could enable the implementation of its integrated A2/AD strategy. These include the continued production and deployment of coastal defence cruise missiles, air/surface/sub-surface-launched anti-ship cruise missiles, submarine-launched torpedoes, and naval mines, along with Russian fighter, bomber, and surface-to-air missile capability. These are intended to provide Russia with the ability to limit access to its territory and extend its strategic depth by providing long-range kinetic strike capability.

Russia's electronic warfare (EW) capability is an integral part of its A2/AD approach and is clearly tailored to target NATO's C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) and weapons guidance systems. Russia's growing technological advances in EW allow its forces to jam, disrupt and interfere with NATO communications, radar, UAVs and other assets. Be it in the air, maritime, land or cyber domains, NATO in fact encounters an increasingly capable adversary focused on developing and deploying a vast array of EW systems as "force enablers and multipliers".

Russia has consistently invested in EW modernisation since 2009, with modernised EW systems entering service across strategic, operational and tactical levels to augment the capabilities of all service branches and arms. Many of those systems are being introduced in units across all services stationed in the Western Military District. Moscow is stepping up its efforts to renew the EW inventory, and this effort is complemented by changes to organisation, doctrine, command structure, training and tactics, as well as techniques and procedures. Russia actively develops a "total package" of EW systems to include a broad frequency range and other systems. In addition to such systems covering surveillance, protection and countermeasures (jamming), they cover measures to

protect Russia's own usage of the electromagnetic spectrum. Many of these Russian EW systems are highly mobile, including small systems deployable by UAVs, making targeting and neutralising them more complex and challenging.

Finally, the Russian EW capability extends well beyond air defence or even A2/AD, as it is fielding a wider array of systems to assist, for example, psychological operations (PSYOPS) and cyber operations. In practical terms, this means that EW capability will be exploited and effects created well beyond the traditional realms in which NATO's thinking about EW is rooted.

6) The nuclear component was something of particular importance during "Zapad-2017". During the exercise the whole nuclear triad was most probably tested. Russia often merges the conventional and nuclear dimensions into one scenario. In fact, such an approach allows Russia to test its escalation dominance in a potential conflict. This is exactly what NATO does not do as such a policy fuels unpredictability and enhances a lack of confidence. In a broader context, the Russian approach also aims at intimidating European societies.

In "Zapad-2017", surprisingly for many, the High North played a crucial role, especially in the nuclear dimension of the exercise.² Yet, the strategic importance for Russia of the High North remains constant, which has been reflected in the continuous upgrade of the weapons systems deployed to the region. The most important new capabilities are the Dolgoruky-class strategic nuclear submarines equipped with Bulava missiles. In addition, there are new types of both sea- and land-based cruise missiles, highly accurate and with long ranges. The new Severodvinsk-class submarines are capable of using missiles with both conventional and nuclear warheads. Another aspect of the strategic scenario in the north is that Russia has forward bases for the deployment, dispersal and support of bombers normally stationed at air bases further inland. Since 2008, Russia has resumed and increased the number of flights involving long-range bombers as well as patrols with strategic submarines.

Yet, the primary reasons for the geostrategic value of the High North are the Russian nuclear submarines and the need to protect them. The submarine patrols are concentrated in areas of the Barents Sea, which is designated as a bastion. One of the prioritised tasks is to protect these bases and patrol areas against hostile forces. In a conflict, Russia will seek to establish control in its vicinity, and to deny others access in the more forward-situated areas. As part of the protection of the strategic nuclear submarine capacity and of Russia in general, a robust aerial defence is also being built in the form of additional air bases, anti-air assets and radar stations for air defence and early warning throughout the whole of the Arctic area, including the Kola Peninsula. In fact, the bastion defence concept was at least partly tested during "Zapad-2017".

7) Since 2013 Russia has significantly changed its combined exercising posture. The "whole of nation" approach to drills was reintroduced. In reality this means that the whole public administration – on both national and regional levels – prepares for a large-scale conflict. The non-military units and agencies train simultaneously with the Russian

2. Operationally the High North encompasses the area ranging from the Northern Atlantic up to the Arctic Ocean.

armed forces. The “whole of nation” approach helps to integrate the military and non-military systems and enhances their interoperability. This concept also aids the boosting of societal resilience and readiness to act in a crisis situation. “Zapad-2017” was yet another example of the “whole of nation” approach where numerous governmental institutions, including in the regions, trained procedures foreseen in a conflict.

8) Since 2013 Russia has also reinstated the practice of organising the so-called snap exercises. These drills come with no prior notification and are predominantly large in scale. They are not subject to the Vienna Document observation provisions unless they last longer than 72 hours. They often happen in NATO’s direct vicinity, especially in the Western Military District, therefore, on NATO’s eastern flank doorstep. They are very hard to trace and could potentially serve as a preparation to the start of a military conflict. For instance, such exercises took place in the Western and Central Military Districts during the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and at various stages of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

The number of Russian snap exercises is constantly growing. In 2013, Russia conducted five snap exercises, 12 in 2014, 13 in 2015, and in January–August 2016, 14 of them. Moreover, the scale of the Russian snap exercises implies that Russia has significantly increased its overall mobilisation capacity and improved procedures for the deployment of forces, thus increasing its ability to conduct expeditionary operations or reinforce various parts of Russian territory in the case of a conflict.

There is no doubt that snap exercises confirm Russia’s strategic political and military unpredictability, as they increase the level of uncertainty and the risk of miscalculation. Indeed, Russia will continue to use snap exercises as a tool of intimidation and coercion in the foreseeable future.

9) Russia’s exercising policy can also be characterised by a lack of transparency. Russia often does not give advanced notice of its exercises which is a standard procedure in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Russia repeatedly splits its large-scale exercises, as in the case of “Zapad-2017”, into smaller ones, either providing a small gap in time or conducting them in different training areas simultaneously with joint command. These tactics allows Russia to avoid the necessity of the notification and invitation of foreign observers. In fact, the Russian armed forces often act contrary to the spirit of the OSCE instruments and use the existing “loopholes”, especially those in the Vienna Document.

Moreover, there are a number of cases where Russia’s reported and notified numbers of troops participating in its exercises differ from numbers provided in Russian media reports, official governmental press releases and, at times, official statements. Russia has also failed to notify about a number of exercises, observed or announced, within the area of application of the Vienna Document that appear to have reached the requisite thresholds.

10) At the same time, Russia uses exercises like “Zapad-2017” to verify the effectiveness of its propaganda machinery. In the media sphere Russia often artificially boosts the number of troops and equipment that

will take part in the exercise in order to test the reaction of NATO allies, neighbouring states (especially Ukraine, Georgia, Sweden and Finland) and European societies. In fact, in the case of “Zapad-2017” Russia wanted to create an impression that this exercise is the only game in town. In fact, it is not. Other operations – including the Russian military engagement in Ukraine and Syria, the Russian hybrid activities in western and central Europe or in the Western Balkans – continue.

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Not since the start of the Cold War has there been such public hand-wringing over Russian intentions in Libya and the Mediterranean: a spate of recent articles warns that Russia's moves in Libya are evidence of an aggressive, expansionistic policy, of a piece with Russian military actions in Ukraine and Crimea. But this is hyperbole: while Russia has taken advantage of US risk aversion during the Arab Spring to strengthen its position on numerous fronts – most notably Syria – its approach toward the greater Middle East is selective and opportunistic. Russia is interested primarily in maintaining and augmenting its geopolitical status, generating influence it can apply to interests closer to home, and assuring itself a piece of economic dividends from any future settlement. It has neither the resources, nor the desire to incur responsibility for a country that may prove to be a mess for a long time to come.

The roots of Western-Russian competition in Libya

When Idris Al Senussi became Libya's first post-independence sovereign in 1951, most Libyans viewed the United States and the United Nations as benevolent actors who helped save them from the ills of European colonialism – and partition. Libya hosted the United States' only military base in Africa, which took advantage of Libya's strategic geography to project forces elsewhere in the Middle East and Africa. But the United States viewed Libya as something of a sideshow to Egypt, which the US was determined to keep from the Soviet sphere of influence (this was before American oil companies discovered oil in Libya in commercial amounts in 1959).

In 1957, then Libyan Prime Minister Mustafa Benhalim successfully pled Libya's case for development assistance with US President Eisenhower. But in the following years, promised levels of assistance were not forthcoming (in part due to budgetary objections from the US Congress), and Benhalim resorted to playing the Soviet card. Western passivity contributed, in part, to the rise of Muammar Gaddafi, who ruled Libya for more than 41 years – and developed long-term military supply

relationships with the Soviets, some of which carried over to Russia and other former Soviet states. The relationship with Russia included a multi-billion-dollar arms deal in 2009, prior to the beginning of the Arab Spring in late 2010.

When Gaddafi set out to attack Benghazi in March 2011, following protests that marked the start of the Libyan revolution, the Obama administration asked Russia not to veto UN Security Council resolution 1973, authorising “all necessary means” to protect civilians. Russia abstained, based on what its diplomats later claimed were firm US assurances that there would be no move towards regime change.

After Gaddafi’s fall, the Russians accused Secretary of State Hillary Clinton of subterfuge, and even outright deception (Clinton later remarked that the Russians were sophisticated enough to understand what “all necessary means” meant). Russian indignation at being left out of the decision-making process on Libya reinforced its determination to secure its already critical strategic interests in Syria at the United States’ and Europe’s expense. In 2012 President Vladimir Putin strongly came to Syrian leader Bashar Al Assad’s aid, in the process edging the United States out of a previously assumed lead role in negotiating an end to the Syrian conflict.

Russia’s interests in the Mediterranean

The Russians had many strong reasons to play hardball over Syria. A factor in the closeness of the Putin-Assad relationship was Assad’s willingness to block the efforts of the Gulf emirate of Qatar to build a natural gas pipeline through the country to supply Europe – which would have undermined Russia’s market power in Europe, and weakened Russian leverage over Europe when defending its actions in Ukraine, for example.

The Russians maintain two military access points in Syria: a supply and maintenance facility at the northern Syrian port of Tartus, and part of a Syrian airbase in Latakia, 84 kilometres to the north. Latakia has been the locus of Russia’s bombing campaigns within Syria against those who oppose Assad, and against the Islamic State (ISIS). Both Tartus and Latakia are practically and symbolically important, as a means to project Russian forces in the Mediterranean. For one, Russia’s access at Tartus extends the length of time Russian vessels can leave their bases in the Black Sea. Russia received a dividend in January of this year when Assad agreed to upgrade the Russian presence to include sovereignty over part of the facility and expansion rights.²

Some of the same strategic issues at play in Syria exist in Libya, but to a much lesser degree. Libya supplies Europe with natural gas from large offshore deposits through the GreenStream pipeline, which has a capacity of 11 billion cubic metres (bcm) per year. Qatar tried for years to get Muammar Gaddafi to agree to its investment in Libya’s gas industry so it could undercut the Russian position in the European energy market. But Gaddafi, like Assad, said no. Further, Russia signed contracts with Gaddafi for arms, oil and infrastructure to the tune of tens of billions of dollars, and would certainly like to recoup or at least partially offset the losses brought by Gaddafi’s ouster.

2. See: <http://tass.com/defense/926348>.

Russia watched as the Western intervention in Libya led to (what it saw as predictable) further chaos and the rise of extremism in North Africa and the Sahel, for which it blamed a bungled US-NATO-led intervention. As of early 2016, there were an estimated 4,800 Russian speakers within ISIS's ranks. Russia knows these fighters will inevitably return and attempt to fortify radicalism within its borders, notably in the republics of Chechnya and Dagestan (Nocetti, 2016). The downing of a Russian passenger plane with 224 people on board by ISIS in Sinai on October 31 2015 underscored the Russian vulnerability to regional terror.³

Economic constraints

Notwithstanding Putin's desire to remain visible and flex Russian muscles, the country's economic conditions do not support an expansionist policy. Russia's economy, which is somewhere between the size of those of Italy and California, has experienced a severe deceleration in recent years due to falling oil and gas prices,⁴ and does not have the resources or the desire to rebuild regional economies, or participate in expensive peacekeeping or cleanup operations.

Russia is acutely aware of the financial costs of its intervention in Syria, and its regional weak points. Escalated tensions with Turkey following the shooting down of a Russian fighter jet in late 2015 underscored Russia's vulnerability with respect to access to the Mediterranean from the Black Sea – If Turkey shuts the Bosphorus to Russian shipping, the Russian navy is forced to go around Europe through the Straits of Gibraltar, which are controlled by NATO forces.⁵ While Russia would surely love to develop military provisioning facilities in the southern Mediterranean as a hedge against unforeseen developments in Syria and Turkey, it would require, above all, reasonably stable commercial deals to justify that move. And that requires a stable government, and a semi-functioning Libyan economy.

Russia and Hefatar

In 2014, a weakened elected government in Tripoli was confronted with two prospective coups – one announced by General Khalifa Hefatar, which did not materialise, and another by an Islamist-Misurata alliance, which did. Those who lost the election created a competing government, based in Tripoli, while the elected government was pushed to Tobruk and Al Beida in Libya's east. Hefatar then set out to build up a more formal army, based in part on members of Gaddafi's hollowed-out military. Over more than three years, Hefatar took back Libya's eastern Oil Crescent (the rich zone of oil deposits and downstream facilities), and then most of Benghazi, from Al Qaeda and ISIS-backed elements, which had overrun the city in the wake of the attack on the US mission in September 2012. Hefatar's blunt approach to the Islamist problem – which made no distinction between self-professed "moderate" and "extreme" Islamists, and relied on a "shoot first and ask questions later" attitude – appealed to Russian sensibilities.

Senior Russian military officers and diplomats hosted Hefatar and his senior staff on several occasions in the Kremlin, and once on a Russian warship off

3. See: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34840943>.

4. See: <https://www.ft.com/content/489f8f0c-ae02-11e3-974d-00144feab7de>.

5. See: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34912581>.

the Libyan coast, an implicit intentional challenge to the UN-led process, whose custodians attempted to sideline Haftar and the Libyan National Army from the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA). Russian talks with Haftar allegedly included discussions about reactivating a \$2 billion Gaddafi-era arms deal, but as the Russians are well aware, Haftar does not have signature authority.⁶ While Russia has adhered to commitments not to violate the UN arms embargo on Libya, it has sold arms to Egypt, and it is widely assumed a piece of that support has been passed on to Haftar. Russian advisors are believed to have been deployed in western Egypt to offer technical assistance to the eastern Libyan government.⁷ Egypt, the UAE and Saudi Arabia have justified their similarly disguised military and logistical support with reference to past (and continuing) support by Qatar and Turkey for radical-infused militias who exert considerable influence within the Western-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) and its lingering predecessor, the General National Congress.

In some measure due to the poor decisions of the international community, the Libyan malady has become almost immune to treatment. Libyans have no confidence in their current government representatives, or the international process that enables them. While “federation” was a dirty word in Libya post-revolution, more and more Libyans say they believe that a bottom-up, regional solution is now the only way forward. And that process is already in play, with most of the major cities and their hinterlands operating somewhat autonomously, if poorly.

If the international community chose to help empower cities and regions to solve some of their own problems, while keeping outside – and internal – spoilers in check, pieces of Libya’s social tissue could be conceivably reconstructed across the country, and ultimately woven into a national legal and administrative superstructure. All of which underscores the futility in the present circumstances of any exclusively top-down solution to the Libyan conflict.

Italy has undermined stability in the longer term by paying Libyan militias (who simultaneously manage the human trafficking) to stop refugee sailings to Italian ports.⁸ Other states’ proposals to set up advance-processing centres for would-be asylum seekers are not much more helpful.

The German government is rumoured to be vetting plans to encourage the growth of economic centres along the migrant routes originating in West Africa as a means of diverting refugees from dangerous Mediterranean crossings. Clearly the only long-term solution to the problem is either to bring stability to Libya itself (Gaddafi had little trouble opening the spigot of illegal migration at will), and/or to address the causes of political and economic distress in the refugees’ home countries, exacerbated by the spillover of weapons and fighters from the Libya conflict.

A waiting game

Under its third Libya envoy, Lebanese politician and political analyst Ghassan Salamé, the United Nations is belatedly trying to address failings in the organisation’s sequential conceptions of a unifying Libyan Political

6. See: <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2017/1/19/russia-arms-libyas-haftar-in-2-billion-weapons-deal>.

7. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/14/russian-special-forces-deployed-in-egypt-near-libyan-border-report>.

8. See: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/mafia-refugees-libya-italy-stop-leave-militia-mediterranean-crossing-sabratha-migrant-boats-a7906666.html>.

Agreement (LPA) by streamlining bloated, contentious bodies within the Government of National Accord (GNA), and reaching out to some groups excluded from the original process. But it remains to be seen how a two-year deadlock will be broken among parties of whom many have little if any incentive to come to a deal, and much incentive to stall. None of this addresses the fundamental questions of process and popular legitimacy, which even if they were to be elided now, would sow the seeds for future discord.⁹

Undoubtedly, Russia's sympathies lie more with Heftar than any other party in Libya. Heftar's virulent anti-Islamist stance (with the glaring exception of the Madkhali Salafi Islamists in his anti-Tripoli coalition) and blunt approach to stability in Libya's east appeal to the Kremlin's sensibilities.

Once Russia felt Heftar had established himself and the Libyan National Army (LNA) as a sine qua non in Libya's near-term political future, the Kremlin took a diplomatic step forward to engage the head of the GNA Presidency Council Faiez Serraj, and publicly emphasised the need for a peaceful, inclusive solution to the Libya crisis, under UN stewardship.¹⁰ In parallel, Russia has engaged with the Tripoli-based Libyan National Oil Corporation (NOC), which, along with other Libyan state institutions like the Libyan Investment Authority (LIA) and central bank have, to varying degrees, attempted to remain above the political fray.

As long as there is an active international diplomatic effort underway, Russia sees only downsides to clarifying its position. As one retired senior UK diplomat noted recently, "the Russians have every reason to sit back and wait for an opportunity to play fixer, rather than risk their necks out in a risky diplomatic process – particularly one that resulted from military action they did not support in the first place."

With respect to the United States, the Russians are also in wait and see mode. It appears President Putin would value an improved relationship with the United States (or at least stem the tensions resulting from the scandal over Russian interference in the 2016 Presidential elections – which Russia seems to have not entirely foreseen). If US President Trump's tweets are any indication, the feeling is mutual.

Regardless, Libya will not likely be the locus of a major contest between Russia and the West, at least in the near future. Vitaly Naumkin, one of Russia's veteran Middle East hands, and UN envoy to Syria, describes the Russian approach to high tension regional issues (apart from Syria, clearly) as one of assuming "either a low profile, or constructive relations with the West" (Naumkin, 2016).

Libya's relatively low priority to both the US and Russia might at some point open the door to cooperation that could be used to model or diffuse tensions between the two elsewhere in the region. Further, Russia understands that that a consistent application of a modest level of interest and support over time, without consistent and overt bias, pays off. Accordingly, Russia's Rosneft last summer became one of the first international oil companies to sign a deal with the National Oil Company for regular purchases of Libyan crude.¹¹

9. Azza Maghur, «ليبيا: ندوة لمعالجة طغى» ميديا قوت, <http://www.arab-reform.net/ar/node/1186>.

10. See: <http://www.libya-al-mostakbal.org/49/27740/العمل-ت-ايسور-ف-ورفال/العمل-ت-ايسور-ف-ورفال.html>.

11. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-oil-congress-rosneft-libya/russias-rosneft-started-to-lift-oil-from-libya-idUSKBN19V1LC>.

Conclusion

There are a number of Russian “nice to haves” with respect to Libya, but few “must haves”. Putin wishes to be perceived as a peacemaker and influence-dealer in the region; and all other things being equal, he would like to bring down the overall temperature in the region, and prevent the spread of the Islamic State – while at the same time encouraging a healthy market for Russian arms. Certainly, Russia would like to assure it has substantive access to the economic fruits of any lasting peace, whenever that might come – particularly in the realm of oil and gas. But every year brings additional complications to the Libya conflict. The longer the international community’s approach to Libya remains weak and disjointed, the more chaos will ensue. Soon, Europe and the United States will likely give up mediation altogether in favour of a strict policy of containment. If this happens, Russia will certainly take the opportunity to say “we told you so”, while attempting to shape whatever remains in Libya to its advantage.

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The EuroMaidan in 2013-2014 showed Russia's unwillingness to recognise the existence of a sovereign Ukraine still perceived by Moscow as within its natural sphere of influence. The subsequent military intervention triggered tensions between Russia and its neighbours and with the West. However, evidence suggests that Ukraine might not be the only trouble hotspot and that the Baltic Sea region (BSR) remains a strategic goal in Moscow's ambitions.

This chapter aims to explore and discuss the main threats and challenges to the BSR that flow from Russia's aggressive attitude to the region as a whole, as well as to individual countries. Kaliningrad Oblast – the westernmost Russian enclave on the Baltic – plays a pivotal role and mission in the Kremlin's strategy and goals.

Kaliningrad: From "double periphery" to the vanguard of the "Russian World"

The collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the breakdown of the "Iron Curtain" inflicted a severe blow to the Russian posture on the Baltic and downsized its geopolitical ambitions. The emergence of independent and staunchly pro-Euro-Atlantic Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland as well as a unified Germany drastically reduced Russia's influence.

Nevertheless, in spite of economic calamity and a wave of separatism that struck the country in the early 1990s, Russia was able to keep the Kaliningrad Oblast, a territory annexed by the Soviet Union in 1945 and considered since then an asset of pivotal importance in a region perceived as vital. During the Cold War, Kaliningrad remained one of the most militarised spots in the world and served as a "military outpost" of the USSR, ensuring military predominance over NATO.

The dissolution of the USSR altered the balance of powers in the region, rendering Kaliningrad physically isolated from the mainland by the borders of newly created sovereign countries. Influenced by the end of confrontation between the West and the USSR a significant number

of domestic and external observers and policymakers predicted Kaliningrad would soon become a “Baltic Hong Kong”, a bridge of cooperation between Europe and Russia. Among other things it was hoped that the huge gap in mutual understanding resulting from decades of alienation could be overcome with the help of Kaliningrad as Russian “gateway to Europe”.

Regretfully, these dreams and hopes were not destined to materialise. In the 1990s Russia did not have any coherent strategy pertaining to the future of its westernmost region. Even though the Kremlin was very well aware of the upcoming enlargement of the EU that was to turn Kaliningrad into an enclave, nothing was done. These policies – to be more precise lack of actions – from the side of the Kremlin had a dire effect: within a very brief period the oblast deteriorated into a “double periphery”: the Russian HIV/AIDS capital, and the “Baltic smugglers capital” (Sukhankin, 2016a). This dramatic transformation negatively affected the outlook of the local population in every possible way. But for the Russian authorities it was not a difficult task to direct public anger against “liberals” and the West. Russian propaganda (at the time rather unsophisticated and making its first steps, but still connected with the Soviet period) would portray the city as a “Russian citadel strangled by the West”.

As far as facts are concerned, these and similar arguments had very little (if any at all) to do with the reality. The Euroregion Baltic (ERB)² and Northern Dimension initiatives³ were specifically created to integrate Kaliningrad into the “Baltic Sea rim”, proliferate economic and cultural ties with other regional players and alleviate the consequences of post-Soviet transition. Moreover, Poland had done extensive work promoting the initiation of the Small Border Traffic (SBT) zone, meeting the staunch opposition of the Kremlin. This finally started to function in 2012 only to be later revoked by Warsaw after Russia-sponsored hostilities in Ukraine erupted.

In stark contrast to 1990s expectations, Kaliningrad Oblast has turned into a “pawn” in a power play with NATO and a sort of a regional “scarecrow”. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the dividing line between the Soviet and contemporary periods. Prior to 1991 the role of the oblast was primarily reduced to being an isolated military outpost tasked with securing Soviet military superiority over the region. Today, things are much more complicated than used to be the case: aside from the military compound Moscow has added a non-military one. Together these pose a probably even greater threat than before 1991.

2. Euroregion Baltic (ERB) was established in February 1998 and is a politically solid and well-anchored cooperation in the south-east of the Baltic Sea region, consisting of eight regions of Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. It was the first Euroregion to formally include a partner from the Russian Federation.
3. The Northern Dimension is a joint policy between EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland, initiated in 1999 and renewed in 2006.

Kaliningrad Oblast: from Soviet “bastion” to Russian “fortress”

During the Soviet period, Kaliningrad Oblast was a heavily militarised and excessively isolated spot closed to foreigners. The level of secrecy reached such heights that even local residents were prohibited from entering certain parts of the oblast. After the breakdown of the USSR many things changed. What remained unaltered, however, were the geopolitical position of the exclave/enclave and its historical experience – qualities that would be used by Moscow in reconverting Kaliningrad into a Russian military fort and a source of threat to the region.

The first disturbing signals were spotted in the 1998–1999 period and were indissolubly connected with the developments in Russia's westernmost region in particular. On July 28th 1998 the Kaliningrad Special District (KOR) was formed. According to an official statement this decision was prompted by the necessity to “protect Kaliningrad Oblast and defend Russian national interests in the southern part of the Baltic Sea”.⁴ In 2009, the KOR would be included in the Western Military District (WMD) as a result of extensive, rather ambitious, frequently criticised, yet still quite effective military reform.⁵ Furthermore, in 1999 the first strategic military games under the code name “Zapad” (“West” in Russian) were carried out. Interestingly enough, previous games under the same code name were conducted by countries of the Warsaw Pact in 1981, which implicitly suggests partial resurrection of the traditions of the Soviet regional presence. Officially it was declared that re-initiation of military activities in Kaliningrad had to do with the process of overcoming the consequences of the dire crisis faced by Russian armed forces in the 1990s. It was specifically underscored that these developments were not levelled against any neighbouring state(s).

Apparently, Russian plans to start remilitarisation of the oblast were inspired by the emergence of the first signs of friction with the West (mainly with the US) over the war in the former Yugoslavia and NATO's eastward enlargement. In this regard, “Zapad-99” demonstrated two main aspects: first, in spite of reconciliatory rhetoric emanating from Moscow, Russia construed NATO's enlargement as a military threat and an attempt to downsize the Russian presence in its traditional spheres of influence. Kaliningrad then became one of the potential means of retaliation. For instance, nuclear weapons were first deployed in the oblast in the early 2000s and the new National Security Concept (2000)⁶, which allowed Russia to use its nuclear arsenal in the case of inability to repel a potential attacker through conventional means, was elaborated as a direct result of “Zapad-99”.

At the time, however, Russia was still recuperating from the economic collapse of 1998 and could not launch militarisation of its western flank: the Kremlin instead saw its main mission in a somewhat different dimension. Specifically, it would not be superfluous to recall events in Kaliningrad in the summer of 2005, when celebrations of the 750th Anniversary of Königsberg/Kaliningrad were held (Lopata, 2006). Assembling the leaders of France and Germany in Kaliningrad Vladimir Putin hoped to create the “European Triumvirate” and simultaneously tried to pit three Baltic states and Poland (which according to Kremlin sponsored-narratives were the most Russophobe elements in the EU) against Berlin and Paris. This attempt however suffered a sound defeat: neither Jacques Chirac nor Gerhard Schröder exhibited willingness to trade partnership with newly accepted EU countries for better relations with Russia. Neither were France and Germany interested in the proliferation of an anti-American “axis” on the pretext of the war in Iraq (2003).

Apparently disappointed with this outcome Moscow decided to switch from “soft persuasion” to ultimatums. The notorious “Munich Speech” by the Russian president, in February 2007, which identified Russia's readiness to challenge the West over self-proclaimed zones of influence, was a turning point. For this purpose two traditionally weak NATO flanks (the Baltic and the Black seas) were to become the main targets of

4. For more information see: http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details_rvsn.htm?id=5867@morfDictionary.

5. Военный эксперт Александр Гольц – о ходе военной реформы. <http://www.svoboda.org/a/24521818.html>.

6. Концепция национальной безопасности Российской Федерации. For more information see: http://nvo.ng.ru/concepts/2000-01-14/6_concept.html.

Russian aggression. Concrete proof came in 2008 with the war against Georgia and the practical alienation from Tbilisi of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and in 2009 with the initiation of massive military build-up on the territory of Kaliningrad Oblast. Aside from the already mentioned military reform, from 2008 on Russia started to activate “Iskander diplomacy” – blackmailing the West with potential deployment of “Iskander-M” missiles on the territory of the enclave as a “response” to alleged anti-Russian activities by the US in Europe.

The year 2009 witnessed proliferation of Russian military-related activities in the Baltic. Namely, in the course of the so-called “Osen-2009” special emphasis was made on upgrading military capabilities of the WMD. For this purpose, the “Zapad” and “Ladoga” war games were carried out: their territorial scope (from the Kola Peninsula to Kaliningrad Oblast and Belarus) and the manpower employed were somewhat comparable (yet less impressive) to exercises conducted by the USSR. Nevertheless, these were dwarfed by the next series of games – “Zapad-2013” – whose territorial scope, manpower and military equipment equalled those of the Soviet period. According to some estimates up to 100,000 military personnel deployed from the Norwegian to Polish borders took part in the event (Järvenpää, 2015).

Moscow’s next moves further articulated the seriousness of its intentions – although for more solid and profound steps the Kremlin had to remove several legal obstacles that did not allow military build-up commensurate with Russia’s plans and ambitions. At this point the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis and the debacle in political relations with the West facilitated the task for Moscow to a substantial degree. In March 2015, it was announced that the Kremlin was no longer bound by the provisions and obligations enshrined in the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.⁷ Aside from huge symbolic meaning (this treaty came to be widely associated with perestroika and the initiation of dialogue between the Warsaw Pact countries and NATO) this decision brought serious practical repercussions.

The first concrete step that ensued – reanimation of the 1st Guards Tank Army on the territory of the WMD (disbanded in 1998)⁸ – not only drastically shifted the balance of conventional military power in Russia’s favour, in many ways it became a sign of reviving Soviet traditions and symbolism.⁹ Aside from this, Kaliningrad Oblast entered into a new stage of militarisation which was mostly associated with deployment on its territory of up-to-date military equipment:

7. А.Ю.Мазура. Заявление руководителя Делегации Российской Федерации на переговорах в Вене по вопросам военной безопасности и контроля над вооружениями. Официальный сайт МИД РФ (10.03.2015). http://www.mid.ru/obychnye-vooruzhenia/-/asset_publisher/MIJdOT56NKIk/content/id/1089925
8. For more information see: http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12076048@egNews.
9. This Army was created in 1943 and its units were among the first ones to enter Berlin in 1945.

- “Iskander-M” missile complexes with nuclear warheads (SS-26 Stone in NATO classification) were deployed in the oblast in October 2016. This complex can target objectives within a range of up to 500 kilometres, effectively covering all the countries of the Baltic region;
- S-300 (SA-10 Grumble) and S-400 (SA-21 Growler) anti-aircraft weapon systems with strike ranges of up to 400 kilometres;
- K-300P Bastion-P coastal defence system (SS-C-5 Stooge) equipped with P-800 Oniks missiles (strike range between 400 and 800 kilometres) that were deployed in Kaliningrad in 2016;
- Sunflower-E (Podsolnukh-E) long-range air and surface radar (500 kilometres of coverage) anti-missile radar Voronezh-DM (some sources claim that it can monitor 6000 kilometres).

As a result of these activities (the deployment of advanced anti-ship and surface-to-air missiles) Kaliningrad has formed the centre of an anti-access/area denial “bubble” (A2/AD).¹⁰ The most distinctive traits of this entity are that it does not start at some fixed spot/perimeter (for instance, 500 kilometres) – its capabilities cannot be identified precisely.

Under these circumstances, the emergence of the new A2/AD should be seen as a source of potential threat not only to Poland and the Baltic states – countries that have most frequently been named as potential targets of Russian aggression – but also to Denmark, Finland and Sweden.¹¹ Incidentally, those three countries have shown a great deal of uneasiness about the Russian militarisation of the Baltic and expressed deep concern about the Aland Islands, Gotland and Danish Straits (Gotkowska and Szymański, 2016). Sweden has started a process of remilitarisation of Gotland Island and brought back military conscription in 2017. The Baltic Sea Fleet (BSF) – the “nest of crime” (Elfving, 2016) – seems to have become a reflection of Russia’s determination to tip the balance of forces in its favour to an even greater extent. Russia’s sweeping decapitation of the BSF’s high command may be deemed a reflection of this thesis (Sukhankin, October 2016b). Yet these countries are not the only ones who might be potentially endangered by growing Russian military presence in the region. For instance, the upcoming “Zapad-2017” war games that are to take place in the autumn have already puzzled many international and Belarus-based observers and commentators. Despite dismissive tones from Belarusian and Russian officials other experts express signs of alarm and uneasiness.

Non-military threats

The military activities conducted by the Russian Federation in the Baltic pose a serious challenge to regional security and peace. Less visible but by no means less significant are the deeds of the Kremlin in the domain of non-military activities. Russian activities are not reduced to state-sponsored programmes/initiatives, they also include the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) as a powerful political actor and the driving force of the “Russian World” project in the Baltic (Sukhankin, October 2016c). The speech presented by Russian Patriarch Kirill in Kaliningrad during the World Russian People’s Council on March 14th 2015 unambiguously displayed the changing perception of Kaliningrad and its role in the “Russian World” project:

“Borders of Russian Statehood” – the title of this conference could not have been more topical anywhere else than here, in Kaliningrad on the shores of the Baltic Sea. Here everything is “breathing” with proximity of the national border, propinquity of other countries, an open sea, so to say – the line where the Russian land ends ... Also, it is a border-territory, an enclave placed in the far West... Kaliningrad Oblast is a fruit of Victory, its material result and Kaliningraders, perhaps to even greater extent than other Russian citizens should feel themselves to be the chief custodians of the Victory. The Oblast was created not merely as a Russian strategic fort-post with a prime task of forestalling this previously mentioned “thrust toward the East” for

10. For more information see: <https://corporalfrisk.com/2016/08/11/kaliningrad-and-the-suwalki-gap-a-look-from-the-other-side/>.

11. And probably even Norway, given Russian activities in the Arctic.

good. It has to become a spiritual fort-post of Russia in Europe. Not however a region being most susceptible to Western influence but a district that is ready for a dialogue with the West to the most possible extent, being prepared to saturate this talk with our national spiritual norms and values".¹²

The council, created in 2007 for the "promotion of Russian language and culture", should in reality be seen as a reflection of Russian geopolitical ambitions in the so-called "near abroad" and refusal to acknowledge the emergence of sovereign states in the region. The new impetus for the project was given in 2009 when Kirill (Gundyayev) became Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus'. The so-called "canonical lands" concept has supplemented the initial meaning of the "Russian World" project, broadening its horizons and territorial scope. In its final version, this enabled Vladimir Putin to state that "Russia does not have borders". This is a very dangerous postulate which has received practical supplement in the course of the Ukrainian crisis.

Of the three Baltic states it is relevant to note how Estonia and Latvia have been targeted by Russia since 1991. Moscow has learned how to pit the ethnic Russian minority against the indigenous population, sowing discord and furthering the rift between these groups. In the meantime, with the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis, the focus of Russian attention has somewhat shifted toward Lithuania. The "crusade" against this country was initiated by the governor of Kaliningrad Oblast Nikolay Tsukanov in 2014 and the local mass media. Vilnius and some "Western security services" have been repeatedly accused of attempts to "create Maidan in the oblast".¹³ Later, however, the rhetoric would alter, changing from mostly "defensive" to more aggressive. It started to be claimed that Lithuania, whose economy was in ruins due to membership of the EU, was being abandoned by its population and that the country is in fact experiencing an exodus of truly Biblical scope. This means that in the short and medium term all three Baltic states will continue to be the prime targets of Russian ideological assault.

Furthermore, aside from frequent instances of cyber and information warfare Russia has increased its use of provocations against regional actors. In this context, it makes sense to recall the most recent episode that occurred in Vilnius in the end of 2016. The Russian Embassy started to disseminate highly provocative leaflets stating that the gap in wellbeing between Lithuania and Kaliningrad is profound and the locals should move to the oblast in pursuit of a better life (Sukhankin, 2017). The documents contained a list of web-pages and information outlets where "more information about Russia" could be found. These included RT, Sputnik, the Russkij Mir Foundation, ORT TV channel, and many other sources that are known for the dissemination of anti-Western materials and the promotion of the "Russian World" ideology. The most hideous aspect of this occurrence was that the Russian Embassy (along with its officials) did not try to deny its involvement. In practical terms this means that Moscow does not shy away from meddling in the affairs of sovereign countries that are parts of the EU and NATO, which is a very dangerous tendency and should be seen as a stern warning to the Europeans.

12. Выступление Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла на I Калининградском форуме Всемирного русского народного собора (14 марта 2015). Available at: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4013160.html>.

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Conclusions and recommendations

1. The strategic importance of the Baltic Sea region. The challenges posed by the Russian Federation to the countries of the Baltic region should not be underestimated or downplayed. This region is not peripheral, rather it constitutes one of the main cornerstones of Russian foreign policy and geopolitical interests. Similarly, as far as facts and evidence are concerned Moscow is to continue proliferating its influence in the region.
2. European cohesion as a response to Russian activities. The EU authorities should demonstrate to the Kremlin that regional challenges are not the problems of individual countries. Russia ought to recognise that bullying one country (group of states) will not be tolerated either by NATO or by the EU.
3. The military dimension. Even though there is no immediate military threat, the EU member states should attain greater cohesion in terms of military cooperation. Even though the US military presence in the region is growing, the balance of power is clearly in Russia's favour. This also means that achieving the 2% NATO benchmark is a must. This would be the best proof of commitment and a serious argument in front of the Russian Federation, where official propaganda does not consider Europe capable of decisive collective actions in terms of military-related activities.
4. Counter-disinformation and coordination of activities in the domain of cyber security should become key elements of NATO and EU coordinated strategies when dealing with Russian activities in the region.
5. Kaliningrad Oblast is no longer a "double periphery" or Russia's backwater region. It has been transformed into a "military fortress" and a pivot of the "Russian World" in the Baltic, and the EU should be aware of both the fact of this metamorphosis and the speed with which it has been accomplished.

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UPDATING ALGERIA'S MILITARY DOCTRINE

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The attitudes of modern Algeria can only be understood by examining its history: its 132-year colonisation by France, its bloody war of liberation against French occupiers, and its reluctance since then to align with any major bloc.

After it gained independence in 1962, Algeria enjoyed immense prestige – second only to Vietnam in the Third-Worldist historiography of sacrifice – because the National Liberation Front (FLN) had won the propaganda and diplomatic war against France even while its poorly armed and ill-trained guerrillas had been defeated in the field. Algeria had frustrated one of the world's major military powers and some powerful people in France, to this day, have not recovered from the humiliation. The film *The Battle of Algiers* defines, for many, the little they know about that struggle. Those fighting for Algeria's independence invented modern guerrilla warfare – the word asymmetrical so fashionable in military and security jargon today was invented, in part, in the streets of the old city of Algiers in 1956.

Since independence in July 1962, power in Algeria is best described as resting on a tripod consisting of the army, the security forces and the system once built around the ruling FLN, a party which never acquired an ideology or an organisation comparable to its equivalent in the USSR. To that was added, after its creation in 1964, the powerful oil and gas monopoly, Sonatrach, and an internationally highly-respected diplomatic service, which played the role of the exquisite velvet glove concealing a hand of steel.

In the two decades which followed independence, Algeria played a leading role in calling for a new world order. French intellectuals rallied to the cause. It is difficult to recreate the atmosphere of the Algiers of those years, let alone understand the particular place Algeria held in the Non-Aligned Movement led by President Tito of Yugoslavia and Prime Minister Nehru of India.

Historical context (1954 to 1979) matters

Historical context is essential in understanding the relations Algeria maintains with Russia, its neighbours and major Western powers. In 1962, two years before independence, Nikita Khrushchev explained to General de Gaulle that he favoured Algeria remaining in the French sphere of influence after independence rather than falling into the American one. As the FLN and its more powerful twin, the Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN) sought weapons and diplomatic support in their fight against France after 1954, they did not find much solace in the ex-USSR. The latter only recognised the Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne (GPRA) in October 1960. The only weapons the USSR ever delivered to the ALN were four helicopters in spare parts to an ALN camp in western Morocco in March 1962. Bear in mind that Algeria was then part of France, and therefore part of NATO. Nelson Mandela visited that same camp, unknown to South Africa's secret service, BOSS, that very same month.

The KGB for its part had a different view of the matter. It trained many officers of the MALG (ministère de l'Armement et des Liaisons générales / ministry of Armaments and General Liaisons, the embryo military security unit within the ALN that was in charge of buying weapons. Its boss, Abdelhafidh Boussouf would emerge as one of the most important actors in Algeria after 1962. The "Boussouf boys" as they were nicknamed included Kasdi Merbah, who ran the much feared Sécurité Militaire (SM) from 1962 to 1979 and ensured Chadli Benjedid became president and not the then minister of foreign affairs, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The latter never forgave the SM or its successor, the Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (DRS). The first promotion of Algerian officers trained by the KGB, known as *Le Tapis Rouge* dates from 1960. Some are still active and the spirit of the KGB still haunts the DRS academy. The KGB did score a goal when they tried to accredit the US with being behind the *putsch des généraux* which in April 1961 tried to topple General de Gaulle. The head of the CIA, John Foster Dulles personally disowned the truth of such an allegation.

Yugoslavia, Egypt and China were more forthcoming in providing weapons for the ALN throughout the fight for independence. The German secret services meanwhile turned a blind eye to Algerian purchases of weapons in West Germany, against the wishes of their government. This they believed would provide the newly minted Federal Republic of Germany with good leverage over France. The FLN set up shop in London but was forced to close it as a result of French pressure on the UK government. The independent reporting of the BBC World Service in Arabic was much appreciated by Algerian nationalists and helped give that service its *lettres de noblesse*. The British government did not apparently interfere. Many senior North Africans still listen to the Arabic service of the BBC every morning.

After 1962, Algeria's SM and the KGB cooperated closely. But these links never translated into an alliance. In the decade after 1967 the USSR tried and failed to convince Algeria to let it use the immense naval base at Mers el Kebir in western Algeria and station Soviet troops on its territory.

After Colonel Houari Boumedienne ousted Ben Bella in 1965, Algerian diplomacy became more markedly non-aligned. Support for the African National Congress (ANC) and training guerrillas to fight against Portugal

in Angola and Mozambique became a hallmark of the country's foreign policy. Strong support to build up the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) came to symbolise the young republic which also gave considerable help to the Polisario Front which fought to stop Morocco from gaining control of the former Spanish colony of the Western Sahara after the colonial power walked out in 1975. That conflict pitted Morocco against Algeria and froze relations between the two countries. Whereas most Algerians have always identified with the Palestinians, they never showed as much enthusiasm for the West Saharan refugees and the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic based around Tindouf in south-western Algeria.

Algeria diversifies its source of weapons (1985 to 2016)

A five-year thaw in the mid-1980s initiated by President Chadli Bendjedid allowed the Algeria-Morocco border to open and the Maghreb-Europe gas pipeline which carries Algerian gas to Spain and Portugal to be built. The project was strongly supported by Ronald Reagan, who warned the EEC (later the EU) against depending too much on supplies of gas from Russia – to little avail. France in particular argued that Algeria was not a more reliable supplier of gas than the USSR.

Relations with the USA meanwhile were developing as American companies played a key role, along with their British and later Japanese counterparts, in developing the country's oil and gas resources after independence. The first ever gas liquefaction plant in the world was built by Shell and started operations in 1964, with the first ever shipments of LNG going to Canvey Island in the Thames estuary. The development of hydrocarbons and other sectors of the country's ambitious development plans were funded from domestic savings, but Western banks and large Exim or Coface-backed guarantees played an important role. The bulk of Algeria's foreign trade, exports of hydrocarbons and imports of machines and foodstuffs was conducted with Western nations where most of the country's postgraduate students went to study.

The 1970s and 80s were the halcyon days of a diplomatic role which saw Algeria oust the apartheid regime of South Africa from the United Nations General Assembly in 1974 and introduce the Palestine Liberation Organisation to it the following year. In 1975, Algeria brought Saddam Hussein and the Shah of Iran to the negotiating table and helped broker an agreement on the Shatt al-Arab dispute. Algeria successfully negotiated the release of the US hostages in Tehran in January 1981. Algeria's diplomats also occasionally suffered for their country's leading role in such mediation. The foreign minister, Mohamed Seddik Benyahia, was literally "shot out of the air" by an Iraqi missile as he was travelling between Istanbul and Tehran on May 3rd 1982 in an attempt to bring Iran and Iraq to the negotiating table. Saddam Hussein apologised in private to the Algerian president, Chadli Bendjedid, arguing that it was a mistake. Taleb Ibrahimi who took over from Benyahia is convinced the Iraqi knew what he was doing.

In diplomatic terms, however, Algeria remained neutral. With former socialist allies such as Serbia it remained on good terms. It supported Serbia throughout the war which tore the former Yugoslavia apart – payback for the days when Tito had given weapons to the ALN. Algeria

considered Serbia to be the nucleus of the region. It refused to grant Kosovo recognition as an independent state in 1999.

The other sacred cow of Algerian diplomacy is an absolute refusal to get involved in the internal affairs of sovereign countries: this explains its silence when every other Arab Muslim country was condemning Russia's war in Chechnya. Algeria has always sought to be an intermediary. In 2016, it refused to break off relations with North Korea after the latter made a nuclear test, despite strong pressure from the USA and South Korea. North and South Korea are represented in Algiers, where the government has excellent relations with both. On March 27th 2014, Algeria abstained in the UN General Assembly vote rejecting Russia's annexation of Crimea and tried to maintain a neutral position between Moscow and Kiev.

As it has diversified the source of its weapons purchases, the Armée Nationale Populaire (ANP), successor of the ALN, has recognised the need to have its officers trained in France, the UK, Germany and the USA. By the late 1980s, after years of negotiations with France, Russia and the US, the ANP opted to buy American air defence equipment and radars. During the civil war in the 1990s, pitting Islamists against the regime, the West put an embargo on the sale of weapons to Algeria. Meanwhile Algerian security succeeded in stemming the flow of medium-size weapons which was coming in from the Balkans through the mafia in Naples. For a decade Algeria learnt to use civilian equipment for military purposes and developed links with China and South Africa – with the latter it is building a drone.

In 2007, Algeria converted its \$7bn debt with Russia into an arms purchase of similar value. Algeria thus remains the only Arab country today to deploy S300 anti-aircraft missiles and own the latest generation of fighters from Russia, the Su30. After India, Algeria is the largest purchaser of Russia weapons and the largest overall purchaser of weapons on the continent. It is the 10th largest arms purchaser in the world and after its \$10bn purchase of German tanks in 2012 it became that country's largest export market for weapons. Today, however, after the halving of the price of oil, Algeria will have to rationalise its military expenditure more than ever before. Fighter aircraft air defence systems are traditionally bought from Russia (\$15bn-worth over the past decade). Germany has emerged as a provider with a contract to buy frigates and transfer the production of optical communications and armoured vehicles to Algeria. China has supplied C28A corvettes and Italy has delivered Agusta Westland helicopters.

Conditions to frame a new defence doctrine

The difficulties Algeria faces in articulating a defence strategy for a world whose post-1945 security structure, inherited from the Cold War, is coming apart, can be examined through two prisms.

The first is the different sensibilities that exist in the Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité and the army high command. The second is that the architecture of power in Algeria needs to be reorganised to meet the requirements of modern warfare – security, economic and cyber. These challenges cannot be met so long as the military refuse to allow the middle classes to partake in the debate on the country's future.

Diplomacy is back in the limelight today but, despite the quality of its diplomats, has less shine than thirty years ago. The oil and gas company and the ministry of energy, for their part, were weakened in 2010 by the dismissal of the powerful minister of energy of the 2000s, Chakib Khelil. Allegations of corruption have clung to him and some of the vice presidents of Sonatrach ever since. These difference branches of power need rearranging. A number of powerful private groups have arisen which are challenging the status quo.

So the Algerian government showers subsidies on consumers when the price of oil is high and makes unexpected and deep cuts when it falls. The Jurassic Park nature of the country's banking system is a major handicap. Until the military accept that bold economic reforms to modernise the Algerian economy will strengthen the economy, the weak performance of the non-oil sector, the cronyism which too often characterises those private sector entrepreneurs who are close to the rulers, the flight of capital, and the difficulty creating real jobs in industry will continue apace. Despite the economic and political reforms led by two military officers, President Chadli Bendjedid and Prime Minister Mouloud Hamrouche (1989-1991), the officers finally put a stop to them, using the emergence of the Islamic Salvation Front to scare the middle classes into supporting a repressive policy which provoked a civil war that claimed more than 100,000 victims. Arab rulers across the Middle East have used similar strategies with the same disastrous consequences. An economy which continues to be a victim of the oil curse does not offer a solid bedrock for domestic stability, a bold foreign policy or greater influence in the north-west African region.

The second point is whether or not to update the doctrine which proclaims that Algeria does not allow its military to intervene abroad: this "doctrine" was honoured in the breach when Houari Boumedienne sent troops to Egypt to defend the Nasser regime in 1967 and again in 1973. Algerian troops helped to protect Western Saharans who fled advancing Moroccan troops in the Western Sahara – then legally a Spanish colony – in the winter of 1975–1976. Algerian troops and security have intervened in Tunisia since 2011, in full agreement with Tunisian political and military leaders, to combat radical Islamic groups. Sophisticated Algerian weapons the Tunisian army did not have, such as attack helicopters, have operated in Tunisia. The Algerians were much quicker off the mark to help Tunisia after the fall of Ben Ali than either the EU or the USA.

Algerian troops have also intervened in Mali and in Libya to protect Algeria's borders. Special Forces directly intervened in Libya, awash with weapons since the fall of the Gaddafi regime, after the jihadi attack on the gas field of Tigentourine at In Amenas, close to the border, four years ago. Defending Algerian oil and gas fields justifies whatever operations the country's leaders deem necessary.

Yet Algeria remains reluctant to send troops abroad because of its fear of them being turned into auxiliaries of a major power. President Abdul-Aziz Bouteflika's physical absence from the political scene, a consequence of his ill health, makes Algeria even more reluctant. No one in Algeria today can take a decision of such importance. The chief of staff of the Armée Nationale Populaire has the role of a manager and has no legal or political obligation to render any account to the people through a parliament whose two chambers (Chamber of Deputies and Senate) are little more

than echo chambers. The chief of staff has never publicly outlined a strategy or policy framework on defence. One can only conclude that non-intervention abroad is a fig leaf which hides the inertia that prevails in the top echelons of power in Algeria today.

The DRS and the army high command disagree markedly in their attitudes toward foreigners. The Algerian army has always been reluctant to engage in any form of joint military exercise that might suggest its idea or *modus operandi* is being challenged. This lack of accountability goes hand in hand with a fierce nationalism which simply brooks no debate on ideas, weapons, and tactics with members of other armed forces. As more and more Algerian officers are trained abroad to handle weapons bought in the US, Germany and Italy, it is difficult to see how the senior brass can resist for much longer exchanging ideas with their peers abroad, be they in the West, China or Russia.

The DRS for its part has for decades been involved in the Middle East and beyond. Its forerunner, the SM, was frequently involved in trying to sort out hijacking crises in the 1970s and 1980s. It helped the US in its fight against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan thanks to Algerians fighting for Bin Laden and in Lebanon where the DRS has worked with the DGSE (Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure), the CIA and Mossad to solve hostage crises. This history has led to a culture of exchange which stands in marked contrast to the army. The crisis, which in September 2015 led to the powerful head of the DRS for twenty years, General Tewfik Mediène, being dismissed by the head of state, has not affected this broader culture.

Algeria's institutions need to be recast if the country is to be in a position in the future to fully assume the role of an important regional power. The ministry of defence since Abdelaziz Bouteflika became president in 1999 has been in his hands. Breaking with tradition he has held the post of minister himself. He has opposed appointing even a military officer to run it, as was the custom before. The best option would be to appoint a civilian but that seems unlikely. Whoever is appointed needs to enjoy a minimum of stability. Parliament and its various commissions, notably of foreign affairs and defence, need to be given real teeth – this poses the question of accountability. Parliamentary commissions need to be able to vet strategies presented by the government. The army, the DRS and the politicians must each play their role and have their powers defined more clearly. The army and the DRS should be kept apart.

These reforms will not necessary turn Algeria into a Western-style democracy nor need that be their aim. They are necessary to ensure clear lines of responsibility and allow Algeria to both project its power and influence more effectively. Whatever the quality of the DRS, the army or the country's diplomacy, a major effort at clarifying Algeria's strategic aims seems imperative for what is the largest country in Africa. Algerian leaders need to engage more with foreign partners and explain to 40m Algerians what the country's regional strategy is. This will ensure greater transparency and overall stability.

CONFRONTING RUSSIA'S NEW IMPERIALISM: THE DIFFERENT FATES OF UKRAINE, BELARUS, AND THE BALTIC STATES

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This chapter assesses how Russia's neighbours – Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic states – cope with Russia's new imperialism. Ukraine is the main target of Moscow's neo-imperialist and annexationist policies because Russia's leading political class has never accepted Ukraine's existence as an independent state. Examples of this range from statements made in speeches and interviews by Vladimir Putin and other Russian leaders, as well as actions which deny Ukraine's statehood, such as rallies in Ukraine by the biker club the Night Wolves, whose leader Zaldostanov is a personal friend of Putin. The recent introduction of the name "Malorossiya" (Little Russia), the old tsarist name for Ukraine, by the separatist leader Aleksandr Zakharchenko, is an even more serious threat. It fits into the Russian strategy to gain control not only over a part of Ukraine, but over Ukraine as a whole. The use of this provocative name has been supported, if not invented, by the Kremlin, and provides a key to understanding Putin's remark that a division of Ukraine "is not necessary".

Although the geopolitical situation of the three Baltic states is much worse than Ukraine's in terms of territorial defence, the risk of Russian military adventures there is lower for two reasons: the Baltic states (despite Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia) are not considered to be part of the so-called "Russian World" (*Russkiy Mir*), and all three are members of NATO, which is on the ground with multinational battle groups. Belarus is a special case, because it has already returned into Moscow's orbit, being a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union. As long as Lukashenka is president, he will try to maintain maximum room for manoeuvre, without being able to free himself from the Russian embrace. The Kremlin will just wait.

Ukraine's three revolutions

Since 1990 the citizens of Ukraine have made three revolutions. The last two of these – the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Dignity or Maidan Revolution of 2013–2014 – are well known. This is less the case with Ukraine's first revolution, the so-called "Revolution on the Granite"

of 1990. The Revolution on the Granite was directed against the new “Union Treaty”, which was meant to continue the Soviet empire in a new form. The revolutionaries renamed the October Revolution Square *Maidan Nezalezhnosti*, Freedom Square. They fought a revolution for national independence. The second revolution, the Orange Revolution of 2004, was different. Ukraine had already obtained its independence. The Orange Revolution was rather a liberal-democratic revolution. It was a protest against election fraud to prevent the election of the pro-Western presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko. But the Orange Revolution was more. It was – again – also a revolution to safeguard Ukraine’s national independence against intrigues by the Kremlin to undermine the young state and bring it back into Moscow’s orbit. The third revolution, the Dignity Revolution or Maidan Revolution of 2013/2014 was about the direction of Ukraine’s foreign policy. Against the will of the majority of the people President Viktor Yanukovich suddenly changed Ukraine’s official pro-EU course to seek membership of the Kremlin’s Eurasian Union. But there was more at stake than Ukraine’s foreign policy: it was about a fundamental choice for the future of Ukraine. This choice was to keep its independence and to get closer to the European Union or to slide back and become – again – part of the Russian empire. This geopolitical choice was not just a geographical question about where it wanted to belong: a choice between East and West. It was, first of all, a question of values. A choice for Europe meant that Ukraine wanted to continue on the road of becoming a fully-fledged liberal democracy. Massive clashes in the streets of central Kyiv – resulting in more than a hundred fatalities – forced Yanukovich to flee to Russia, which granted him asylum.

The war in Ukraine

We know what happened later: Russia invaded and annexed the Crimea, while it fought a non-declared war in eastern Ukraine together with local proxies, which ultimately led to the occupation of Donbas and the formation of two Russian puppet regimes: the so-called “Donetsk People’s Republic” and the “Luhansk People’s Republic”. In my book *Putin’s Wars – The Rise of the New Russian Imperialism*, written and published before these events, I predicted this imminent Russian aggression, writing:

If Ukraine were to opt for deeper integration into the European Union, a Georgian scenario could not be excluded, in which the Kremlin could provoke riots in Eastern Ukraine or the Crimea, where many Russian passport holders live. This would offer Russia a pretext for intervening in Ukraine in order “to protect its nationals” and dismember the country. Unfortunately, such a scenario cannot be excluded. It is a corollary of the five principles of Russian foreign policy, formulated by President Medvedev on August 31, 2008. The fourth principle he mentioned was “protecting the lives and dignity of our citizens, *wherever they may be.*” It leaves the door open for military adventures throughout Russia’s “neighborhood.” (Van Herpen, 2014:247)

This is the logical conclusion of a thorough analysis of the Kremlin’s policies in the past decades. The Kremlin’s implicit plans could be found in official Kremlin documents, in speeches by the Russian leaders and in interviews with opinion leaders in the Russian media. Some enlightening examples go as follows:

First of all, Russian annexationism is not new. Already on July 9 1993, the Russian Supreme Soviet – the predecessor of the present State Duma – demanded in an almost unanimous resolution the return of Sevastopol to Russia. Yeltsin would shell the parliament building some months later. But Ukrainians already expressed their fears. In 1994 three Ukrainian analysts wrote: “There is a concealed desire to begin Ukraine’s breakup, beginning with Crimea” (Haran *et alii*, 1994:212). This was confirmed by the British-Ukrainian analyst Taras Kuzio, who wrote: “Finally, a large number of Russians and political groups find it difficult to accept Ukrainian independence and Ukrainian control over the Donbas and Crimea. There is a deep and widely held belief within the Russian elite that is, of course, highly irritating to Ukrainian leaders, that Ukrainian independence is somehow temporary and therefore reunification inevitable in the future” (Kuzio, 1994:206). Kuzio added that “Sergei Stankevich [Yeltsin’s political adviser] was reported as telling foreign diplomats not to bother opening embassies in Kiev because they would soon become only consulates again anyway”. (4) Also Zbigniew Brzezinski observed the Russian revisionism, writing in 1994: “Quite symptomatic of Moscow’s continued reluctance to accept Kiev’s independence as an enduring fact was the contemptuous dismissal of it as (in the words spoken to me by a senior Russian policymaker in 1993) ‘that conditional entity called Ukraine’” (Brzezinski, 1994:130). All this happened shortly after Ukraine’s independence and one could hope that these revanchist sentiments would subside over time. However, this was not the case. On the contrary. The Russian fascist ideologue Aleksandr Dugin openly declared that “the battle for the integration of the post-Soviet space is a battle for Kiev” (Van Herpen, 2013:84). Dugin, maybe, was an extreme case. But what should we think of Vladimir Putin, who, in the spring of 2008, told US President George W. Bush that Ukraine “is not even a country” (Snegovaya, 2014).

There is also Putin’s personal support for the nationalist motorcycle gang the Night Wolves, who, since 2009, had been holding provocative rallies throughout Ukraine, waving huge Russian flags. The gang leader, Aleksandr Zaldostanov, who goes by the nickname “The Surgeon,” is Putin’s personal friend. In 2012, when Putin came to Ukraine on an official visit, he clearly showed his contempt for Ukrainian statehood and Ukraine’s president (who, at that time, was the pro-Russian Yanukovich!), riding several hours around the Crimea with Zaldostanov and the Night Wolves, keeping Yanukovich waiting for him in Kyiv. On February 28 2014, shortly before Crimea’s annexation the same Zaldostanov arrived by plane from Moscow in the Crimean capital Simferopol, declaring on his arrival: “Wherever we are, wherever the Night Wolves are, that should be considered Russia” (Shuster, 2014).

At a press conference on March 9 2014, after the occupation of Crimea and nine days before its annexation, Putin declared: “We considered, consider and will consider that Ukraine is not only our most nearby neighbor, but indeed our neighboring brother republic. Our military forces are comrades in arms, friends, many of them know each other personally. And I am certain and I want to emphasize that Ukrainian soldiers and Russian soldiers will not be on different sides of the barricades, but on the same side of the barricades”². Also intriguing are remarks made by Putin in an address to the Duma and Federation Council on March 18 2014, the day of the annexation of Crimea, when he said: “We have always respected the territorial integrity of

2. The interview is reproduced in Baburin (2014), p. 87.

the Ukrainian state.” And he continued: “I want you to hear me, my dear friends. Do not believe those who want you to fear Russia, shouting that other regions will follow Crimea. We do not want to divide Ukraine; we do not need that.” There is, firstly, Putin’s ultimate cynicism, daring to declare, just after the Crimea’s annexation, that he had “always respected the territorial integrity of the Ukrainian state.” But even more interesting is his second remark: “We do not want to divide Ukraine; we do not need that”³. This sentence, apparently used to reassure the Ukrainians that with the annexation of the Crimea the Russian land hunger had come to an end, was in fact very ambiguous. The same sentence could be read in another way: that Russia would not be satisfied with conquering only some parts of it, but wanted Ukraine as a *whole* to be incorporated into Russia or subdued as a vassal state, something which would make a division of Ukraine “not necessary.”

“Malorossiya”: more than just a phony catchword

In 2009, before the annexation of the Crimea, Fyodor Lukyanov, a prominent Russian analyst, declared “that not a single country in the former Soviet Union, including Russia, can say for certain that its borders are historically justified, natural and, therefore, inviolable. Many of the states that have emerged in place of the former Soviet Union are weak and some may not ultimately be viable” (Lukyanov, 2009:59). If you look around the world you will see that there is almost no country of which the borders “are historically justified” and “natural.” However, this is no reason that the existing borders are not inviolable. In fact Lukyanov opens up a Pandora’s Box by using the concept of “historically justified” and “natural” borders to justify the actions of a revisionist power which is violating international law.

The Minsk Process, which started in February 2015, has not brought an end to the war in Ukraine. The Minsk Process is in fact a house of mirrors in which the aggressor is hiding behind his puppets, the so-called local separatists. The aim of this process is for the Kremlin to keep a “frozen conflict” in eastern Ukraine. But keeping a frozen conflict is not the Kremlin’s ultimate goal. We have seen in Georgia how two frozen conflict zones after many years were transformed into “independent states.” And even this is probably only a transition toward a final incorporation of the two regions into the gargantuan Russian state. Also the frozen conflict in Donbas is far from frozen. It is in reality a festering wound. In the period between March 2014 and May 2016 over 9,000 people were killed (including civilians and combatants of both sides) and more than 21,000 injured (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Because the fighting has intensified over the last year, the actual number (in August 2017) is over 10,000 people killed. This is not a “conflict”, this is war. As in the case of Georgia, the Kremlin is able to wait for years for a window of opportunity to start a new offensive.

It is far from excluded and even plausible that the Kremlin considers the present turmoil in Washington caused by the Trump presidency as such a window of opportunity. It is telling that in July 2017 a new plan was suddenly launched by the leader of the “Donetsk People’s Republic,” Aleksandr Zakharchenko, calling for the unification of the two separatist statelets and inviting other parts of Ukraine to form “Malorossiya”⁴.

3. Address by the President of the Russian Federation, “Official Website of the President of the Russian Federation,” March 18, 2014. <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6889>

Malorossiya, which means “Little Russia”, was the old name for Ukraine in tsarist Russia. Zakharchenko declared that the plan was made “to reintegrate the country”. Malorossiya would be constituted “within the borders of present Ukraine”. We return to Putin’s remarks in 2014 that he didn’t want a partition of Ukraine and wanted to keep its unity. “Malorossiya” is the new name of this undivided Ukraine. Putin’s personal envoy to Ukraine, Vladislav Surkov, called the plan a way of “sparking a debate” within Ukraine and Putin declared during the July 2017 G20 summit in Hamburg once more: “I am absolutely convinced the interests of Ukraine and Russia, of the Ukrainian and Russian people, fully match”(Dickinson, 2017). Pavel Felgenhauer, the defence expert of the *Novaya Gazeta*, who is usually well informed, wrote that during a meeting in the Kremlin “Surkov reportedly said, “All this hype about the fantasy Malorossia state is good – it emphasizes that Donbas is fighting not to separate from Ukraine but for its territorial integrity, for all of Ukraine and not for a part (...).” Felgenhauer added that “the Kremlin does not need a “frozen conflict” in Donbas with an ever-growing price tag, when the real goal is to take and “integrate” the entirety (or most) of Ukraine” (Felgenhauer, 2017).

Imminent danger for the Baltic states?

Recently the three Baltic states have also become increasingly nervous about a Russian threat. Two of the three, Estonia and Latvia, have significant Russian minorities. There has been speculation about the possibility of a “hybrid” scenario: the infiltration of “little green men” in the Russian-speaking provinces adjacent to the Russian frontier. (14) However, such a scenario, which was adapted to the situation in Ukraine, is not very probable in the Baltic region. There are several reasons for this. The first is that a prolonged low-intensity war fought by proxies and Russian special forces (without insignia) does not really pay off. It would only lead to enhanced Western sanctions and the intervention of a joint Western NATO force. A war in the Baltics would for the Kremlin rather be a *blitzkrieg*-style operation, an “all or nothing” gamble, leading to a quick occupation. Its objectives would be to end the separation of the exclave of Kaliningrad from mainland Russia, to conquer the Baltic sea ports of Riga and Tallinn, to “bring back” the ethnic Russian population of the Baltic states into their “homeland” Russia, and – last, but not least – to push NATO back.

The Kremlin knows that the strategic situation in the Baltic region is disadvantageous for NATO. In a series of war games conducted by RAND, a US defence research agency, between the summer of 2014 and the spring of 2015, the outcome of a simulated Russian invasion of the Baltic states was that NATO could not successfully defend the territory. The longest it has taken Russian forces to reach the outskirts of Tallinn and Riga was 60 hours (Shlapak, Johnson, 2016). The dire strategic situation is reinforced by the relative isolation of this region. The only connection between Poland and Lithuania is the “Suwalki Gap”, a 64-mile-wide strip of land in north-eastern Poland. North of this “gap” is Kaliningrad, south of it is Belarus. This gap could easily be cut off by Russia. Some have compared it with the “Fulda Gap” in Cold War Germany, which, at that time, was also considered a vulnerable spot in the Allied defence. General Ben Hodges,

4. «Malorossiya Aleksandra Zakharchenko ne vpisalas v Minskiy protsess», RIA Novosti (July 18, 2017). <http://www.newsdnr.ru/index.php/novosti-dnr-lnr/2155-malorossiya-aleksandra-zakharchenko-ne-vpisalas-v-minskiy-protsess>

commander of US Army Europe, has warned that in the exclave of Kaliningrad there is a “significant amount of capability”, including anti-ship weapons, air defences, and electronic warfare. “They could make it very difficult for any of us to get into the Baltic Sea if we needed to in a contingency.”(16) In 2015 the Kremlin reconstituted the 1st Guards Tank Army, a unit formed in the Second World War and disbanded in 1999. Composed of 500–600 tanks, 600–800 infantry fighting vehicles and 35,000 to 50,000 soldiers, the army paper *Zvezda* touted it as an army, “able to neutralize the threat from the Baltic countries” (*Zvezda*, 2016).

“Is Russia really preparing for a war with the Baltic countries?” asked Vadim Shtepa. “The overwhelming opinion in the West is that this is unlikely; but it should be noted that just three years ago, the forcible annexation of Crimea and the presence of Russian tanks in eastern Ukraine also would have sounded like nonsense” (Shtepa, 2016). Since the occupation of Crimea NATO has reinforced its defence of the Baltic states, deploying a multinational battalion in each one, as well as in Poland. These troops, though not sufficient to repel a Russian attack, have rather the function of a tripwire: in the case of Russian aggression the Kremlin risks a full-out war with the 28 members of NATO. The Kremlin will, therefore, think twice before it starts war games in the Baltic (other than the usual provocations). For Moscow the three Baltic states – different from Ukraine – also do not necessarily belong to the “Russian World” (*Russkiy Mir*). The population speaks non-Slavic languages and the majority is not Orthodox, but Protestant (Estonia and Latvia) or Catholic (Lithuania).

What will happen to Belarus?

Belarus, on the contrary, is considered by the Kremlin to be an integral part of the “Russian World”. Despite its formal independence, it is completely integrated into Moscow’s structures: it is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, as well as of the Kremlin’s lookalike mini-Warsaw Pact, the CSTO. Because it is economically dependent on Moscow, Moscow’s power in Minsk is well established. In 2003 Putin revealed his annexationist agenda, when he proposed a merger of both states and invited Belarus to join the Russian Federation as six *oblasts* (Dmitri Trenin, 2011:46). Belarusian President Lukashenka, not prepared to become Putin’s local satrap, declined the offer. Since then Lukashenka has been trying to manoeuvre between Moscow and West. However, he lacks the power to be really independent and resembles rather a canary “free” in its cage, kept in the house of a cat. In the 2013–2015 period Putin took new steps to foster the bond between the two countries, proposing to open a Russian air base in Belarus⁵.

In October 2015 four hundred protesters gathered in Minsk, yelling: “The Russian base is occupation” (Reuters, 2015). Lukashenka refused Putin’s proposal, but had to come up with proposals to improve the Belarusian contribution to the Single Air Defense System of Russia and Belarus. He seemed to prevail when the Kremlin agreed to sell Belarus four of its most modern Su-35 fighter jets (Bohdan, 2016). But this will certainly not be the end of the affair. In August 2017 rumours circulated that the Zapad 2017 manoeuvre, also taking place on the territory of Belarus, had the hidden objective of forcing Lukashenka’s hand and “leaving some Russian troops

5. Belarus has already some light Russian military facilities on its soil: a radar station in Gantsevichi and a naval communications center near Vileyka. A Russian airbase would add an element of a different caliber and cement the Russian-Belarusian strategic partnership even further.

behind" in Belarus (*Delovaya Gazeta*, 2017). However, this fear seems not to be justified: it would unnecessarily complicate the Kremlin's relationship with Belarus and Moscow can wait.

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RUSSIA IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN: A COUNTERWEIGHT TO THE WEST?

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In March 2014, in the midst of the Ukraine crisis, President Barack Obama claimed that Russia was merely a “regional power”. But the eastern Mediterranean has borne witness to how Russia has raised its status in the international arena in the time since. The governments of Cyprus, Greece and Egypt have seen Moscow as a counterweight to the West and have played the Russia card in their negotiations with Brussels and Washington. And for its part, in Syria Russia has conducted its first military intervention beyond the borders of the former Soviet Union since the end of the Cold War. The projection of Russian military and diplomatic power into the Mediterranean marks a new era in the relations between Russia and the West, opening up a new scenario of geopolitical rivalry that goes beyond that of the Russian “close stranger”.

Cyprus: special ties

The Republic of Cyprus was a member of the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War and the arsenals of its National Guard contained weapons acquired in the Soviet Union. This defence connection with Moscow was maintained after the dissolution of the Soviet Union with the purchase of tanks and combat helicopters in the 1990s. In 1997 an international crisis broke out when the Cypriot purchase of the S-300 long-range anti-aircraft defence system from Russia was revealed. Turkey warned that it would take the deployment of the missiles in Cyprus as a . The “Cyprus missile crisis” was resolved by moving the missiles to Crete where they were placed in the hands of the Greek armed forces.

The special ties between the Republic of Cyprus and Russia returned to the news with the financial crisis that hit Europe in 2008. Cypriot banks had amassed considerable quantities of Greek private debt and were dragged into the Greek crisis due to overexposure. The prospect of a financial bailout, with the resulting social costs and restrictions on economic sovereignty put the possibility of some kind of agreement with Russia on the table in 2013. As well Russians making up a quarter of the tourists visiting Cyprus, large amounts of money also arrive, using

Cyprus as a means of accessing third countries or merely as a fiscal paradise. According to estimates, between a third and half of the funds in Cypriot banks originated in Russia, with Cyprus being the second largest recipient of Russian investment in 2011 and the country that received the third highest amount of Russian investment over the 2005-2011 period.

In exchange for favourable loans, the Cypriot authorities were willing to negotiate Russia's entry in the exploitation of the offshore gas fields in the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone. But the Russian-Cypriot agreement concluded with a loan being granted at a low rate of interest which in no way constituted a rescue package that allowed the country's banking sector to be cleaned up. Thus the feeling was that the "Russia card" had been merely a diplomatic manoeuvre used by the authorities in Nicosia in their negotiations with the European Union, leaving the geopolitical situation in the status quo ante. Nevertheless, Moscow was not left empty-handed. It received permission to use the Andreas Papandreu airbase, formed of the military sector of Paphos International Airport, and the Evangelos Florakis naval base near Limassol on the island's southern coast. With the idea being to have bases from which to evacuate its citizens in the case of a crisis in the Middle East, Russia obtained rights of use only "in cases of emergency and for humanitarian missions". Moscow, meanwhile, offered to act as mediator between the island's Turkish and Greek institutions, as well as seeking to be a partner in the exploitation and distribution of the natural gas on the bottom of the Mediterranean.

Greece: a new foreign policy direction

The victory of the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) in the Greek legislative elections held on January 25th 2015 was greeted with hope on social networks by those sympathetic to the idea of a leftward turn in Europe that would challenge the orthodoxy of the Brussels institutions. But on the morning after the election, jubilation became bewilderment when news arrived from Athens of a government formation agreement not with left-wing groupings but with the ultra-conservative party Independent Greeks (ANEL).

During the 2012 electoral campaign, SYRIZA had advocated a Greek withdrawal from NATO, the closure of its facilities on Greek soil and breaking off military relations with Israel. To be sure, seen through the prism of left-right ideology the government alliance with ANEL appeared incoherent, but it made sense given their common views of how Greece fits into the European Union. Out of either conviction or calculated interest, both parties had sympathies for or ties with Vladimir Putin's Russia, which opened the door to a new foreign policy direction for Athens. The day the government alliance was announced, Prime Minister-designate Alexis Tsipras held meetings with the Russian and Chinese ambassadors, which were read as a message to the European Union. That very week the Greek government protested about the way the European Council had issued a communication blaming Russia for the intensification of the fighting in eastern Ukraine, thereby opening up a line of dissent on the Ukraine crisis. Some months later, in April 2015, Prime Minister Tsipras travelled to Russia where he called directly for the end of European sanctions on Russia.

A potential Russian economic aid package to Greece was not on the agenda at that meeting, but Alexis Tsipras made a second trip to attend the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum in June 2015. There Tsipras declared that Europe had been living in the illusion of being “the hub of the Universe in the literal sense” while “newly emerging forces are coming to play a more vital role at the economic and geopolitical levels”, citing the examples of the cooperation between the BRICS countries and the Eurasian Union led by Russia. This time a hypothetical economic Russian bailout was openly proposed by the Russian press. But more than new loans, Moscow was offering an extension of the Turkish Stream gas pipeline, which will connect Russia with Turkey through the Black Sea and presents itself as an alternative to the stalled Nabucco gas pipeline project, which would have taken gas from the Caspian Sea basin to Central Europe. According to the German weekly, Greece could receive between €3bn and €5bn for the transit rights for Russian gas.

The predicted revenues of the Turkish Stream extension were a promise for the future and Greece had international creditors to face. Alarm bells rang in Washington, where perceived European intransigence towards Greece might be leading to the fall of Greece, pushing it out of the European Union into the arms of powers such as Russia. President Barack Obama himself took steps to ensure European leaders avoided what Secretary of the Treasury Jack Lew called a “geopolitical mistake”.

Egypt: a tricky balance

Egypt, the most populous Arab country and champion of pan-Arabism, made a well-known change of alignment during the Cold War. With the Camp David Accords in 1979, it completed its transformation from Moscow's ally to Washington's. Military aid became a guarantee of both the alliance with the United States and peace with Israel in a country where the armed forces are the fundamental state institution. The Arab Spring put Washington in a difficult position and the 2013 coup d'état left relations between Egypt and the United States in crisis.

In 2014, Egypt was the second-largest recipient by volume of US military aid in the world, receiving \$1.3bn. But after the coup d'état in Egypt on July 3rd 2013, the US government decided to impose restrictions, allowing the shipment of spare parts but not new systems. The delivery of 12 F-16 fighter-bombers, ten Apache attack helicopters, kits for the modernisation of 125 M-1 Abrams tanks, and 20 Harpoon anti-ship munitions was therefore halted, despite the fact that in the case of the Apache helicopters, the contract dated from 2009 and had already been paid for by the Egyptian Ministry of Defence. Pressure from Congress, which was key to the United States placing restrictions on military aid to Egypt, was a response to issues relating to the handling of funds and the final destination of the military material, deficiencies in which had been detected in an audit. Nevertheless, in April 2015 Washington approved the transfer of the withheld defence material but introduced reforms to the programme of military aid to Egypt: it changed the financing model for one that was less advantageous to the Egyptian Ministry of Defence and set the goal of focussing military aid on areas of US interest.

One of the US government's reasons for lifting the restrictions on the transfer of military material to Egypt was the rise in jihadist violence in the Sinai Peninsula and the possibility that the chaos generated by the new phase of the Libyan civil war would spread into the country. The Egyptian government's clear concern about its relations with its largest defence supplier in the midst of two conflicts – one local and one regional – prompted it to search for new suppliers.

President Sisi's first visit to a non-Arab country after the 2013 coup was to Russia in February 2014; President Putin returned the visit in February 2015. Cairo's new relationship with Moscow includes the habitual Russian package of agreements on energy and defence. The bilateral negotiations resulted in the signing of weapons sales agreements, and Russia completed the sale to Egypt of 50 MiG-35 fighter jets and 46 Ka-52 attack helicopters, as well as S-300 anti-aircraft defence systems, which represented a leap in Egyptian capabilities. As a gesture of good will Russia also gave a corvette warship to the Egyptian navy. In the civil field, Russia granted a credit to Egypt in November 2015 of \$25bn to be repaid over 35 years for the construction of a nuclear power station to be built by the company Rosatom in the north of the country and which should be ready in 2022.

On October 31st 2015 the two countries were united by the tragedy involving a plane from the Russian airline Metrojet, in which an explosive device detonated shortly after take-off from the tourist enclave of Sharm El Sheikh. The plane, carrying Russian tourists home to Saint Petersburg, fell into the Sinai Peninsula killing all 224 occupants. Just a few months later, the Egyptian authorities declared that it had been a terrorist attack. In this context, Russia has offered advice on the fight against the jihadist groups operating in Sinai. Within the framework of this new phase, a joint military exercise focussed on the anti-terrorist fight, "Defenders of Friendship", took place on Egyptian soil over 11 days in October 2016. The Russian newspaper reported of secret negotiations for the establishment of a Russian military base in Sidi Barrani (located around 95km from the border with Libya) on October 10th but this possibility was quickly denied by an Egyptian government spokesperson.

One issue of regional importance on which Russia and Egypt share an international agenda is the Syrian civil war. On October 8th 2016, as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Egypt voted alongside Russia to oppose a French draft resolution demanding an end to air operations over Aleppo. On the same day, Russia presented a draft ceasefire resolution for which Egypt voted in favour. The direction of the Egyptian votes produced unease in Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The latter had given economic support to the government that emerged from the 2013 coup but cut the supply of hydrocarbons to Egypt due to the disagreement. This new international role for Egypt led the Iranian Minister for Foreign Affairs to propose that it should participate in the multilateral peace negotiations over Syria.

Egypt's harmony with Russia and Iran's stance on Syria is based on the Egyptian government's hostility to the Islamist political agenda – not for nothing did the current president lead a coup d'état against the Muslim Brotherhood. The distancing from its traditional allies in the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula is due to differences over the support for Islamist

forces in places such as Syria and Libya. In the latter country, Egypt has intervened militarily and supplied fighter jets to the Tobruk government, while Turkey and Qatar, for their part, support the Tripoli government.

An indication that the Egyptian strategy is to diversify its allies and not to break with the West (in the end the contracts with US defence companies have continued) is the new relationship established with France. President Hollande visited Egypt in April 2016, where he announced loans worth \$2bn and signed a number of bilateral agreements. Egypt bought French defence systems worth €1bn, including satellite communication systems, Rafale fighter jets, two "Mistral" class amphibious assault ships, a FREMM class frigate and three "Gowind" class corvettes. The purchase of Rafale fighter jets is significant because of their overlap in both features and missions with the MiG-35s bought from Russia. We may therefore deduce that Egypt is looking to ensure it can maintain its military capacities in the case of a relations crisis with any of its strategic partners.

Seeking to maintain good relations with the United States, Russia and its traditional regional allies means preserving a tricky balance. All the more so if we bear in mind that Egypt is going through a deep economic crisis, which some local experts qualify as the most serious since the 1930s. As with Greece and Cyprus, given Russia's economic situation its capacity to replace the economic support provided by Egypt's traditional partners is debatable.

Syria: a historical ally

Syria was Moscow's ally during the Cold War and an important client of the Soviet military industry. The Russia that rose from the ashes of the Soviet Union inherited this special tie. With the international embargoes on Iran, Iraq and Libya, the Syrian government became the Russian defence industry's leading client in the region. The contracts signed totalled \$4bn in 2012. At the same time, other additional ones worth \$2bn were negotiated. As it happened, the circumstances were such that Libya took years to make large arms purchases and just after the lifting of the international embargo, with the contracts with Russia only recently signed, the civil war broke out. The fall of Colonel Gaddafi's Libyan regime meant Russia saw contracts worth \$4bn disappear. Hence the importance of Syria, which has become one of the five largest clients of the Russian defence industry worldwide.

Shipments of Russian arms and munitions were made regularly and discreetly during the first years of the Syrian civil war through the use of a fairly complex and opaque network of intermediary companies disentangled by Tom Wallace and Farley Mesko, two investigators from the C4ADS organisation using only open sources. They were called "The Odessa Network" because many of the companies' headquarters were based in the Ukrainian port city. The Russian shipments have ranged from assault rifles to advanced anti-aircraft and anti-ship missile systems.

On the eve of the civil war, Syria was host to the only Russian military facility outside the territory of the former Soviet Union. A total of 600 military personnel and Ministry of Defence officials lived in Tartus in 2011. Even today, the city's port remains the only support

infrastructure for the Russian fleet in the Mediterranean. The Russian facilities there were until recently basic and nothing compared to US naval bases like Rota and Naples. They consisted of two piers to which was fastened a floating workshop from the Black Sea Fleet on rotating deployments. The Port of Tartus hosted the Russian flotillas deployed in the Mediterranean, while the only Russian aircraft carrier was obliged to lay anchor in the bay due to lack of space in the port. The Kremlin announced on December 23rd 2016 that Russia had signed an agreement with Syria to carry out expansion works on the Russian facilities in Tartus. According to RT, after the work the Syrian port will be able to host Russian aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines.

The first decisive Russian intervention in the international arena in favour of Bashar al-Assad's regime occurred in 2013, after the chemical weapons attack on August 8th against the Syrian civilian population had opened up the possibility of Western military intervention. President Obama had stated in a press conference on August 20th 2012 that the use or even the transport of chemical weapons in Syria would constitute a «red line» that would change his «calculus» on the conflict. After a build-up of US forces in the eastern Mediterranean, a military intervention seemed plausible. In London on September 9th a meeting took place between the British and American foreign policy chiefs, and John Kerry and William Hague met the press. Answering the question of which option remained to President Assad to stop a possible Western attack, Kerry said that he would have to hand his chemical weapons over to the «international community». The Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, quickly offered to mediate and the Syrian government accepted the proposal. The Syrian chemical weapons arsenals were eventually destroyed in an US navy vessel. The role played by Russia, sparing the Syrian regime from a military operation by hesitant Western powers, was considered a great victory of Russia diplomacy which made the country an important actor in the Middle East. Reaffirming his commitment to supporting the Damascus government, in July 2015 Vladimir Putin warned that Russia would respond to Western intervention in Syria during the visit to Moscow of the Syrian foreign minister, Walid Mualem.

The shipment of new arms for the Syrian army was followed in summer 2015 by the sending of advisers and trainers, a symptom of greater Russian commitment to the war after Bashar al-Assad himself recognised the exhaustion and lack of personnel in his armed forces. The red line for the Syrian government was the fall of the garrison at the Abu al-Duhur airbase, which left practically the whole province of Idlib in the hands of the Jaish al-Fatah opposition forces. The obvious direction of travel was the coastal strip of Syria, stronghold of the Alawite minority and cradle of the al-Assad clan. After requesting help from Moscow, on September 30th 2015, the Russian military intervention in Syria officially and publicly began – the first outside the borders of the former Soviet Union since the end of the Cold War.

The Russian deployment consisted, principally, of sending an air contingent to “Bassel Al-Assad International Airport” in the province of Latakia, forty kilometres from Tartus. Its facilities were extended and adapted by the Russians to convert it into the Khmeimim airbase. The tasks on the ground were shared. If Russia carried out aerial attacks, the effort of supporting the governmental forces on the ground fell to Iran,

which was charged with organising and training the Syrian militias of the National Defence Force. What is more, given the scarcity of Syrian combat personnel, Iran has facilitated the deployment of Shia militias and volunteers from Lebanon, Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Russia's intervention has contributed to changing the course of the war between the regime and the opposition forces, a war that since its beginnings has witnessed individual victories for one or another group without any definitive result being glimpsed. The government forces retook the initiative, achieving milestones like surrender of Daraya, cradle of the revolts against the regime, after four years of siege, and the taking of Aleppo. Nevertheless, the fall of the historic city of Palmyra into the hands of Islamic State, whose liberation in March 2016 was celebrated by the Russian authorities with a concert in the city itself, shows that a complete victory for Damascus remains some way off. In fact, the end of the Russian intervention was announced in March 2016 and again in January 2017. But, although part of the contingent was repatriated at that time, the Russian military operation remains ongoing. In fact, it has been announced that the Khmeimim airbase will be converted into a permanent Russian base.

According to comments made in December 2016 by the Russian defence minister, Sergey Shoigu, the intervention in Syria has provided an opportunity to test 162 weapons systems in combat and detect deficiencies in them. Russia's military intervention in Syria has undoubtedly served as a showcase for its military industry. Having an airbase on Syrian soil, there was no need to send an aircraft carrier or to fire the "Kalibr" cruise missiles from vessels in the Caspian Sea or a submarine in the Mediterranean. These were obviously shows of military strength.

Despite the one-off impacts of the advanced armaments used by Russia, Moscow has carried out a "low cost" military campaign, in which its air force has extensively used unguided munitions such as cluster bombs and incendiary bombs. What is more, the Russian air force has used the tactic of bombing from a great height to minimise the risk to its aeroplanes and crew, but which brings with it a consequent lack of precision and as a result an inordinate number of civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian facilities such as hospitals.

The re-emergence of Russia as a counterweight to the West in the eastern Mediterranean is more the result of the context of the European Union's economic and political crisis than Russia's strength. The potential Russian economic bailouts for Cyprus and Greece were put on the table more as negotiating trump cards with the EU than actual realities, if we consider the size of the Russian economy. But in this tug of war, Russia has made geopolitical advances. Similarly, the new relations with Egypt and the central role in Syria have been possible because the Kremlin has occupied the vacuum left by the United States in the region. The absence of a clear and coherent strategy from the White House during the Obama presidency was undoubtedly the product of doubts about the results of a limited military intervention generated by the experience of the 2011 intervention in Libya. The rounds of peace talks in Kazakhstan and meetings like the tripartite summit between Russia, Turkey and Iran clearly show that the United States finds itself outside the group of truly influential actors in the conflict, whereas Russia continues to play a central role.

EUROPE AND ITS GAS SUPPLIERS: HOW CAN THE SECURITY OF EU SUPPLY BE IMPROVED?

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How much gas European Union members might require ten or twenty years from now is impossible to ascertain precisely. Indigenous supplies are certainly declining but demand for gas is also falling. It has dropped by 12.5% across the EU over the last decade according to the latest BP Statistical Review. What is not in doubt is that the EU will continue to depend on outside suppliers for much of its gas. Surging renewable supplies could push demand down further in the future but a global gas glut could allow European importers to sign long-term deals with suppliers from around the world. The EU's dependence will, in the view of other observers, keep growing and be greater in 2030 than it is today. That means that the policy framework within which the EU's gas policies, in particular its import policies, are framed is of interest, not just to its members but to current and future outside suppliers of gas.

Forecasts for future EU gas demand vary widely. Six key factors must be taken into consideration when trying to assess future growth. They include other sources of energy; the decommissioning of nuclear power plants; the future use of coal; the increasing market share of renewable energy; uncertainty about the growth in EU gas demand; slow economic growth in several European countries; energy efficiency and climate policies.

Since the financial crisis of 2008, demand for gas and energy in general has declined. That may have bottomed out in 2015. Demand began to pick up two years ago. Recent "business as usual" scenarios anticipate stagnant levels of gas demand until 2040.

Gas produced by EU member states has been declining since 1985. New gas discoveries have been small and getting smaller. They are also increasingly costly because of their size and proximity to urban settings. Production from the new fields has not kept pace with the decline of maturing ones. The majority of gas reserves in Europe are held in mature reservoirs located in the countries bordering the North Sea. Existing aging infrastructure has become a barrier to field development.

Overall, 70% of EU gas production is accounted for by two countries, the Netherlands and the UK. Continued restrictions by the Dutch government on production in the Groningen field and maturing production from other onshore and offshore fields suggest that future production will decline. In the UK, the decline in investment and drilling activity in the North Sea over the past decade has spelt fewer discoveries. Moreover, mature fields are facing significant decline, despite recent improvements in production efficiency.

Where will new imports of gas come from?

EU domestic gas production will thus continue to decline sharply. Any unconventional gas resources, such as from shale, can – if and when they are developed – only lessen and not arrest this decline.

The EU's gas net imports in the future will grow, simply because the import requirement will mostly mimic the gas demand (growth) path. According to the Observatoire Méditerranéen de l'Energie, the EU may have to look for 100 billion cubic metres (bcm) more new gas supply sources in 2030 than in 2015. Some will come from non-traditional sources. Half of this increased volume is the result of declining EU production, the other half is explained by the increase in demand.

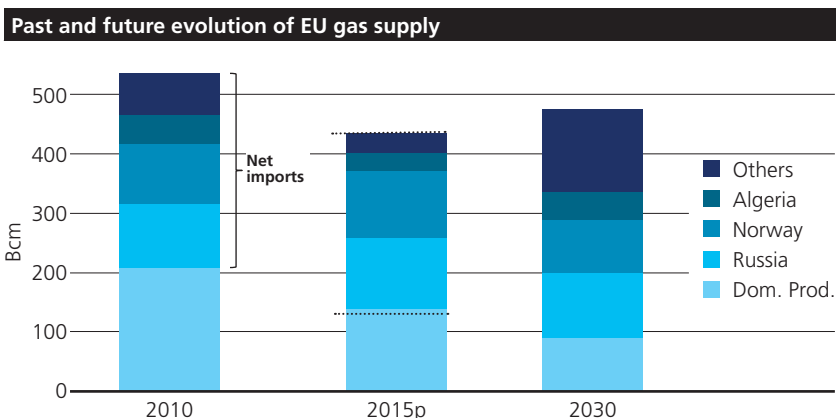
In 2015, the European Union was importing more than two-thirds of the gas it consumed. Russia supplied 34%, Norway a little more than 25%, and Algeria 7%. These three traditional suppliers currently account for two-thirds of EU gas supplies but almost 90% of its imports. The other sources of gas supply to the EU market include Libya, which has a long-standing pipeline under the Mediterranean Sea to Italy, Azerbaijan, which is sending gas to Greece through Turkey by pipeline (around 0.6 bcm/yr), and LNG sourced worldwide. The question then becomes – where will the additional gas imports needed by 2030 come from?

Supplies from Russia are priced competitively but they are becoming a matter of geopolitical concern. Although Russia will remain the main source of European gas imports in the future, European countries will diversify their sources of non-EU supply as they seek to decrease their dependency on Russia. Countries such as Poland and other eastern European countries, former members of the Soviet bloc, remain overwhelmingly dependent on Russia for supplies of both gas and electricity provided by grids built in the Comecon era. They are not happy that Gazprom's dominance in the region has served to make European regulators, buyers and governments dependent on Russia and thus increasingly uneasy. They note the contradiction in German Chancellor Angela Merkel's position: on the one hand she is a driving force behind EU economic sanctions against Russia over its intervention in Ukraine, on the other she is a strong supporter of Nord Stream 2 and Germany is shepherding the project through the EU. When completed it will turn Germany into the main hub for gas imports into Europe. Russia has cemented its grip on supplies to Europe through cheap pricing and readily available supplies. But, in the words of the former Polish prime minister, Jerzy Buzek, now chair of the Industry Committee of the European Parliament, Nord Stream 2 and the Energy Union cannot coexist.

The present level of supplies from Norway is considered secure for another decade, but its future expansion will most likely be constrained because of the depletion of Norwegian gas reserves. A slight increase in imports from Algeria may compensate for the declining share of Norway, which would be welcomed in Algeria, which has lost market share in Italy and France in recent years. It would be an essential building block in a much needed strategic dialogue with Algeria, Africa's largest country, where stabilisation through economic development is essential. Algeria is, alongside Libya and Tunisia, a key partner in helping to halt the flow of refugees from Africa to Europe.

These factors strongly suggest that the EU should look for alternative suppliers and routes to meet its future gas demand. One of these is the gas route known as the Southern Gas Corridor.

The TANAP (Trans-Anatolian Pipeline) Project which will run through Turkey from the border of Georgia to Greece will have an initial annual capacity of 16 bcm. The pipeline will from 2019 transport 6 bcm of gas from Shah Deniz Phase 2 of Azerbaijan to Turkey and 10 bcm to European markets through the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline. Northern Iraq has significant gas reserves, and gas from there to European markets through Turkey could be another potential contribution. Gas from the eastern Mediterranean could also offer an important new source, though the dispute on the maritime border on the continental shelf between Israel and Lebanon is hardly a good omen.



Source: Observatoire Méditerranéen de l'Énergie (OME).

East Mediterranean gas, like the Azeri gas, would improve the security of supply to the European gas market by way of diversification of the gas portfolio, increased flexibility and competitiveness. The region holds well documented and large hydrocarbon resources: the Tamar and Leviathan fields offshore Israel, Aphrodite off the southern coast of Cyprus, and the giant Zohr gas field in a deep offshore zone of the Mediterranean off the coast of Egypt. Two United States Geological Survey assessments in 2010 (one for the Levant Basin Province and the other for the Nile Delta Basin Province) confirm this potential – almost 10 trillion cubic metres (tcm), which is nearly one-third of current Russian proved reserves. Of course, this magnitude of resources must be confirmed by drilling. Only time will tell the true potential of the region.

The amount of discovered resources that are proven so far is rather small, some 3 tcm (two-thirds of which is in Egypt, one-third in Israel and Cyprus). And yet, the region remains one of the world's most underexplored areas and has good prospects for additional gas, and perhaps, oil reserves. Boundary disputes – notably around Cyprus – may however complicate further exploration and drilling.

These factors have understandably made the east Mediterranean region a rising favourite for international oil and gas companies. What also makes the region attractive is the fact that it is very close to Europe, a major gas consumer market. Only Norwegian and part of the North African gas resources are within this geographical proximity.

Overall, future east Mediterranean gas volumes available for exports will increase robustly in the future, even though eventual levels will largely depend on developments in Egypt. So, it is likely that the region could achieve annual gas export levels of 30 bcm between 2024 and 2038. There is however a caveat: much depends, on what additional reserves might be found and the level of Egyptian domestic demand.

However, except for Egypt, the absence of large export infrastructure in the region has been a major challenge for converting discovered resources into productive capacity. Today, no meaningful export infrastructures exist in Israel and Cyprus. There exists only a recently completed and small capacity pipeline to deliver Israeli gas to Jordan. If their gas resources are to find their way to international markets, several export options are envisaged whether through LNG or pipelines. All these options are complementary not mutually exclusive.

In order to encourage the flow of gas from the region into Europe it will be necessary to encourage and facilitate investment in developing resources and gas transport infrastructure in the region. Getting the countries in the region to collaborate and cooperate is a formidable diplomatic challenge to be overcome. There is much scepticism from the business community amid low gas prices and concerns over political risk.

Algeria's contribution

Any contribution by Algeria to meeting the EU shortfall in gas will depend on EU willingness to buy more but also, crucially, on that country's capacity to develop new resources. Roughly one-half of all Algeria's conventional reserves of oil and gas have been used to date. Production dipped after 2007. Very tough exploration and development costs imposed by Algeria on foreign operators attracted only the most resolute to work in the country. Only one new barrel of reserves has been added over the past decade to every barrel produced. This ratio will only go up if more exploration is undertaken, which in turn requires a softening of conditions for international companies working in Algeria.

Proven gas reserves are estimated at 2745 bcm of gas as of December 2015; probable and possible estimated conventional reserves would add a further 1500 bcm. What is new is the growth of non-conventional resources. The recent decision of the Algerian government to relaunch

the development of non-conventional oil and gas reserves, estimated at between 170-180bn barrels of oil equivalent, adds a new dimension to the story. Where gas alone is concerned, Algeria is estimated to be the country holding the third-largest recoverable reserves of non-conventional gas in the world after China and Argentina. They are estimated at more than 22,000 bcm. Production of gas could be steadily increased in the years ahead. Algeria could move back to the 60 bcm a year it was exporting during the mid-2000s. That however will require good management in Algiers – not an outstanding feature of the management of Sonatrach and the Ministry of Energy in recent years – and a certain willingness on the part of EU countries to consider Algeria as a more important strategic partner than hitherto. After all Sonatrach has never once interrupted supplies of gas to the EU since they started in 1964.

Algerian gas is transported to the Iberian peninsula via two separate underwater pipelines. The oldest is the Maghreb-Europe Gas Pipeline which transits through Morocco to carry gas to Spain and Portugal. It has operated since 1996. It has a capacity of 12 bcm. Medgaz, which carries Algerian gas directly across the Mediterranean to Almeria, has a capacity of 8 bcm. In 2015 these pipelines were operating at 60% capacity.

Europeans may care to remember that during the first Ukraine-Russia gas crisis in 2005, Algeria was able to increase its gas exports to the old continent at 24 hours notice. It is also worth considering that Sonatrach's long-term gas contracts with its EU partners expire between 2019 and 2021. So far the Europeans have not rushed to renegotiate them – which begs the question as to whether security of supply really concerns them that much. Contrary to reports, Algeria is in no way running short of gas.

Two of Europe's major gas players are not bereft of contradictions of their own which make devising an overall gas policy for the EU more difficult. France and Germany are key architects of sanctions against Russia following its annexation of Ukraine in 2014 but leading companies in both countries seem more interested in getting gas as cheaply as possible, a policy which at times undermines the foreign policy goals of their leaders.

The EU's policy of liberalising its gas market and improving the connection between pipelines has had a very positive outcome in Ukraine, depriving Russia of major leverage where gas supplies are concerned. Indeed the introduction of reverse gas flows to Ukraine from its western neighbours such as Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic have allowed Ukraine not only to escape from the embrace of Gazprom but to buy its gas more cheaply than hitherto. The reverse flow game has however penalised Poland which still has long-term take or pay contracts with Gazprom. Indeed, through Nord Stream 2 Gazprom and German companies can sell gas to Poland more cheaply than Poland buys it from Russia. As Gazprom knows the price Poland pays for the gas it sells to the country it can ensure that enough cheaper Russian gas pumped through Germany is offered to Poland which meantime is stuck with a take or pay clause. Increasing the debt burden of Poland's gas company is a perverse result of the liberalisation of gas policies in Europe

which is unlikely to be held up by the European Court of Justice, but Germany's complicity with Gazprom hardly speaks of a serious EU policy regarding gas security. Germany is effectively undermining EU energy security.

The official line in Berlin is that Nord Stream 2 is just another straightforward commercial venture with which neither the EU nor the US should interfere. The project cements the sensitive relationship between Germany and Russia and helps to establish Germany as an entrepôt in the European gas market, replacing the declining gas production from the Dutch and British sectors of the North Sea. But the US Senate has just voted 97-2 in favour of extending sanctions against Russia. Many Europeans dislike the Senate bill because it makes it harder for EU companies to do business with Russia, acting extraterritorially to constrain foreign firms while appearing to offer a helping hand to US energy exporters. But, as Professor Alan Riley, fellow of the Institute of Statecraft, points out, Nord Stream 2 has become the subject of "an effective multidimensional, multi state disinformation campaign in its own right." Russia remains very dependent on oil and gas revenue, which provided almost half its export revenue in 2016. It cannot control oil prices but Gazprom, which is a state company and a tool of Russian foreign policy, has every incentive to maximise its share of the European market by means fair and foul: completing Nord Stream would allow it to increase its share of EU imports from 34% to 40%. The project destroys the very concept of diversifying supplies.

Promoting Nord Stream 2 divides the former Comecon members of Europe from those in Western Europe, especially Germany. Bringing more Russian gas to the heart of Europe will further increase Gazprom's market power in Germany and have a strong anti-liberalisation effect. Riley concludes that "the union's underlying principle is solidarity, and EU institutions – as well as Germany – will have demonstrated little solidarity with their eastern members. Nord Stream's successful development would do further damage to the EU's integrity. Post Brexit, one would have thought that the EU would make solidarity a priority, or at least avoid measures that would divide member states."

A further consideration is that Germany is already regarded as having too much power in Europe, notably in southern Europe, where its policies are blamed for unending austerity. As Nord Stream is very much the creation of the Social Democratic Party, the chancellor would lose little by allowing the project to stall and would win respect in those parts of the US administration and Congress which are looking for support against Russian behaviour in Ukraine and Syria. Alain Riley suggests that allowing the project to fall into the hands of European Commission lawyers who could find good reasons for not proceeding might be a way out of the present situation.

Can Spain and the western seaboard act as a secondary European gas hub?

The same holds for France. Another question worth considering is whether Spain could play a significant role in enhancing the EU's security supply. It has Europe's largest gasification capacity at 60

bcm, 75% of which is not used. Two major pipelines connect it with Algeria, both of which are running well below capacity. The Chinese economic slowdown and the building of new LNG liquefaction capacity in North America suggests that the liquidity of the LNG export potential in the Atlantic basin will likely increase in the years to come, as the US starts exporting gas. That will put pressure on LNG prices. Potentially Spain could be a conduit for LNG resources making their way into the EU from different Atlantic sources. Together with resources from Algeria more natural gas could be fed into the rest of the European market.

The Iberian peninsula has significant LNG facilities with regulated access and is connected with pipeline gas to North Africa. If the capacity of the Midcat (now called STEP) pipeline was doubled to 15 bcm the extra gas which would flow into France and beyond from the Iberian peninsula would encourage higher market integration and price convergence with the rest of Europe and reinforce infrastructure connections within France and western Europe. That however is unlikely to happen, as French companies will defend their market share in the lucrative French market tooth and nail. With three gasification plants at Fos-Sur-Mer, Montoir-de-Bretagne and Dunkirk, they have no desire to allow new supplies into the market.

The French regulator, the Commission de régulation de l'énergie (CRE), made its position quite clear in June 2016, arguing that France would have to shoulder two-thirds of the \$3.36bn cost of boosting the Midcat pipeline's capacity. The CRE is doing no more than protecting the market share in France of French gas companies. France, like Germany, seems intent on protecting the market share and profits of its major gas companies rather than contributing to the architecture of greater EU energy security.

The issues of greater EU energy security are left to heads of government. In the Madrid Declaration of March 4th 2015 the EU Commission president, Jean-Claude Juncker, and the leaders of France, Spain and Portugal agreed that better connections between the Iberian peninsula and the rest of the EU would help develop an integrated European energy market. This project is deemed of common European interest but the words uttered in Madrid are wishful thinking. They pay lip service to a goal the French have no intention of delivering. Defence and security experts interested in broader geopolitical goals may wring their hands but narrow profit motives often trump broader policy goals. This episode offers yet another demonstration of the EU's difficulty – some would say incapacity – when building a long-term foreign policy.

Beyond the possible role of Spain, might the western seaboard of Europe contribute to Europe's energy security? The western seaboard boasts a very liquid and open LNG market, but one that cannot be fully used because of French and German policies. This point is underlined by the role that British gasification terminals played in the 2009 Ukraine-Russia energy cut-off. The UK has the second largest regasification capacity in the EU, at nearly 50 bcm. It also has a major pipeline exporting capacity across the Channel of 30 bcm. As a result, during the 2009 crisis the UK was able to switch the pipeline into full reverse flow and send additional LNG-sourced flows into France, Germany and the Netherlands.

This begs the question as to the potential for Spain and the UK to help supply the EU market and the greater contribution Algerian gas resources could play in such a scenario. The load factor of gas turbines in the EU is 45%. Were that increased to 75% the need to use coal and help Europe meet its proclaimed policy of reducing emissions of CO₂ would disappear.

Whether the EU ultimately gives the go ahead to Nord Stream 2 will determine the shape of the EU's gas import pattern for years to come as well as its security. If Nord Stream 2 is built, Russia will play an even more important role than hitherto, but Algerian gas supplies are unlikely to match the level they reached in 2010. That in turn will make any in-depth strategic dialogue between Algeria (and eventually Libya) and Europe less rewarding. It is not easy for the EU to balance strategic relations with countries which lie beyond between its eastern and southern borders. The challenges posed by large-scale immigration from Africa, climate change and terrorism, let alone the need to stabilise North Africa economically, suggests it would be well advised to pay more attention to Africa's largest country and its capacity to supply more gas to Europe.

WHEN THE *RUSSKIY MIR* AND THE SPANISH-SPEAKING WORLD MEET: RT AND SPUTNIK IN SPANISH

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As a critical element of a multidimensional political warfare scheme, disinformation represents a serious challenge for European democracies. Convinced that it faces an existential threat from the West, Russia aims to turn some key features of democracy, such as the free flow of information and the open and plural nature of European societies, into a strategic vulnerability. The internet, especially through social networks, offers open access to the heart of liberal democracies. This is where the Kremlin deploys its information warfare with the aim of weakening NATO and the EU in general. Spain, a committed member of both and also a platform for reaching the Spanish-speaking world of Latin America and the United States, is no exception to this rule.

Unlike in Soviet times, Russia is not trying to sell the benefits of its system but to sow doubts and contribute to tensions within Euro-Atlantic countries. It is no longer a case of arguing “we are better”, but of saying we are all equal, which helps to reinforce the Kremlin’s message to its domestic audience regarding what it believes is the hypocrisy and corruption of the West. Similarly, Russia takes advantage of the open Western framework built upon the paradigm of the free flow of information to attack its adversaries. It is an environment that can easily and at low cost be saturated with fake news and tendentious narratives. The political impact of these tools remains to be determined with precision but, in a context of post-truth and as the legitimacy of liberal democracies has been weakened by the economic crisis which has contributed to polarising society, its impact is potentially devastating.

While the diagnosis is clear, the remedy is anything but. The Russian disinformation machine offers sophisticated products that are difficult to unravel and combat and they are adapted to each target audience. On the tactical level, various initiatives have proliferated – among them the EU’s East Stratcom Task Force – to monitor and denounce fake news and provide accurate information. Although necessary, this is only part of the solution and has its own dilemmas, since it will always be easier and cheaper to saturate an environment with fake

information than to debunk it, and it also means that those who disinform get to set the agenda. But what to do at the strategic level remains uncertain. Is it possible and advisable to limit the flow of information? Can it be done in advance without knowing the content and only the source? What is to be done when the authorship is unclear? These questions, so far, have no obvious answers.

Russia and the information warfare

Russia sees a world which is currently going through fundamental and rapid changes because of the emergence of a multipolar international system whose principles, according to the predominant view in the Kremlin, will most likely be forged by conflict and military might. Therefore, for Moscow, stark competition, uncertainty and confronting values are central elements on the immediate horizon. This perspective, which puts the emphasis on threats and dilutes the value of cooperation, is reflected in official reference documents adopted by the Kremlin in recent times such as the *Foreign Policy Concept* (November 2016), the *National Security Strategy* (December 2015) and the *Military Doctrine* (December 2014).

Within this general framework, Russia is aware of its structural disadvantages in terms of economics and conventional military capabilities when facing other major powers. That is why Moscow attaches the utmost importance to both its nuclear deterrence capacity and the asymmetric methods and instruments that allow it to maintain strategic parity, especially with a West perceived as the main adversary and threat to Russia. The emphasis placed on the United States and some European countries that the Kremlin regards as strategically subordinate to Washington is explained by its conviction that they implement a strategy whose ultimate goal is to overthrow the current regime in Russia. This perception, fuelled by recurrent misunderstandings and frustrated Russian expectations in its relationship with both NATO and the EU, has led to the consolidation of a victimhood narrative whose central axis is the antagonism with the Euro-Atlantic powers.

Leading Russian strategists have conceptualised so-called “non-linear warfare” as a reference model for future armed conflicts. The central points are that wars will be undeclared; there will be broad use of kinetic and non-kinetic tools in close coordination; the distinction between the military and civilian domains will become even more blurred; and battles will take place in the information space as well as in physical arenas (Hansen, 2016: 4). Therefore, military and non-military elements will be united in an integrated all-encompassing strategy in which propaganda, disinformation and control over information will be essential elements for securing the success of military operations.

In the discussion on this new way of understanding the war, an article published in February 2013 by General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, proved to be very influential (Gerasimov, 2013). After the annexation of Crimea and the undeclared war in Donbas, circulation of this article, popularly known as the

“Gerasimov doctrine”, was boosted since it anticipated many of the elements deployed in these operations. However, two aspects must be highlighted: on the one hand, it is not a doctrine and, on the other, Gerasimov did not *invent* the hybrid war but reflects on what he interprets the West is launching against Russia. In his reading, the Arab Springs play a central role: from the perspective of the Kremlin, they are a continuation of the Colour Revolutions and reveal the potential and importance of the methods and forms of asymmetric intervention. Conventional forces – understood as those that can be clearly identified – should only be used, the Russian general points out, at the end of the conflict once supremacy has been achieved in the battlefield.

Disinformation – the deliberate spreading of false information – becomes thus a decisive element within this multidimensional political warfare scheme. The Russian propaganda and communication machine is therefore conceived as a strategic weapon, but with the purpose of being used massively to undermine, disorient, distract, shake, weaken or paralyse the adversary. The most important and worrying feature is that Russian thinking does not draw a clear distinction between periods of war and peace and entails broad, permanent information warfare.

This approach is in stark contrast with the Western one which, even according to Russian sources, limits the information war to “tactical information operations carried out during hostilities” (Giles, 2016: 4). Similarly, it is worth underlying that for Russia information warfare is a broad and inclusive concept that “can cover a vast range of different activities and processes seeking to steal, plant, interdict, manipulate, distort or destroy information [...] The delineation of activities in the cyber domain from other activities processing, attacking, disrupting or stealing information is seen as artificial in Russian thinking” (Giles, 2016: 4, 8). Thus, “distributed denial of services attacks (DDoS), advanced [cyber] exploitation techniques and Russia Today television are all related tools of information warfare” (Smith, 2012: 8).

The Georgia war in August 2008 marked a turning point leading to the current scenario as it prompted deep reflection in the Russian authorities. Russia won the war and achieved the strategic objective of “reinforcing Russian control of Georgia’s separatist regions [but faced] numerous tactical and operational problems [...] the Russian military had to rely on superior numbers instead of quality” (Gressel, 2015:2). Similarly, Moscow interpreted the coverage of major international media during the conflict as a defeat of its communication system.¹ Hence, the Kremlin decided to undertake a profound military reform and rethink its information strategy.

RT, Sputnik and the Kremlin’s propaganda machine

Russia Today – created in 2005 initially to give a more positive image of Russia to English-speaking viewers – was renamed RT in 2009. The channel remained in line with the Kremlin’s agenda but its goal was no longer to provide news about Russia or the Russian point of view on international news: it worked above all to spread anything that questioned and contributed to troubling and eroding the legitimacy of Western countries.

1. The videos of former Georgian President Saakashvili chewing his tie and the interrupted interview with the mother and the South Ossetian girl fleeing the Georgian bombing of Tskhinvali broadcast by the US channel FOX are a recurrent reference in the Russian conspiracy vision.

Similarly, “Russia Beyond the Headlines” was created in 2007 and currently owns 19 web portals in 16 languages, as well as paper formats distributed as supplements with some of the most important newspapers in the world. In 2013 the *Rossiia Segodnya* (“Russia Today”) conglomerate absorbed the RIA Novosti agency and the radio broadcaster “The Voice of Russia” and added the newly created Sputnik News in 2014 (Lucas & Pomeranzev, 2016). RT is not officially linked to the same media group but its director, Margarita Simonyan, is also the editor-in-chief of Sputnik.² The telephone number of “Russia Beyond the Headlines”, which is part of the TV-Novosti group, is the same as that of RT (although with another extension number), a fact indicating that it also belongs to the same communication project.

The creation of platforms such as Free Video – which since 2009 has offered subscribers free content with high quality images and in 2013 became the Ruptly agency, whose materials are paid for, although at very competitive rates – reflects the intention to reach the maximum possible share of audiovisual markets. Especially relevant was the creation, in January 2015, of Sputnik.Polls, the agency that defines itself as “a project of international public opinion in cooperation with leading research companies such as Populus, IFOP and Forsa”. According to the information provided by Sputnik, “the project organizes regular surveys in the United States, Europe and Asia on the most sensitive political and social issues”.³ However, a brief review of the list of such surveys shows the strong bias when it comes to the selection of the topics, always with a highly favourable approach to Russia, with examples such as “More than a third of Italians and Germans believe that Crimea is part of Russia” or “The US and Europe disagree on the extension of the sanctions against Russia”.

The report by the US intelligence community on the alleged Russian interference in the 2016 US elections indicates that: “The Kremlin spends \$190 million a year on the distribution and dissemination of RT programming, focusing on hotels and satellite, terrestrial, and cable broadcasting” (ICA, 2017: 10). The Hungarian research institute Political Capital in turn calculates that Moscow allocates €370 million per year to its media plan abroad, which also includes Sputnik and “Russia Beyond The Headlines”, as well as other “minor” local media in different countries of interest to Russia, such as the Baltic countries and central and eastern Europe. The same US report notes that “RT states on its website that it can reach more than 550 million people worldwide and 85 million people in the United States”. According to the channel’s own management, “the RT website receives at least 500,000 unique users every day. Since its inception in 2005, RT videos received more than 800 million visits on YouTube (1 million views per day), which is the highest [figure in the world] among news outlets” (ICA, 2017: 10).

The impact that both media claim to have is difficult to verify. Sputnik claims to have offices in more than 20 countries and more than 14 million consumers on social networks in different languages. “Sputnik broadcasts through its websites, analogue and digital radio, mobile device apps and social media. Sputnik cables are published in English, Arabic, Spanish and Chinese on a regular basis” the statement says. It adds that “Sputnik’s websites are available in more than 30

2. See: <https://mundo.sputniknews.com/politica/201705311069598363-rusia-simonian-washington-injerencia/>.

3. See: https://mundo.sputniknews.com/trend/sputnik_opiniones_2016/.

languages, including English, Arabic, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Polish, Portuguese, Serbian, Turkish and French".⁴ Even more important is the weight of RT. This firm runs channels and online platforms in five languages, in addition to Russian: it broadcasts in English, Spanish and Arabic, and maintains websites in French and German and it has already announced the intention to launch the channel in French. All of them are directed from the headquarters in Borovaya Street in Moscow, although it also owns offices in Washington, London, Paris, Berlin and Madrid, among other places. 2,300 people from 40 different countries work at RT. However, certain secrecy surrounds these venues, whose addresses and telephones are sometimes difficult to find on the internet.

The ultimate goal of all these media is to promote the Kremlin's vision on specific topics, to increase its influence and ability to set the agendas and narratives in European public debates. In some of these media you can occasionally find some critical points of view.⁵ However, when dealing with matters the Kremlin regards as strategic, dissonances are not noticed and messages in different media are mutually reinforcing. And since February 2014, when the Russians began intervening in Ukraine, the "Kremlin has been de facto operating in a war mode, and Russian President Vladimir Putin has been acting as a wartime leader" (Trenin, 2017). The situation is aggravated by the apparent belief among the Kremlin elite of the impossibility of a satisfactory accommodation with the West. Weakening NATO and the EU is therefore a priority goal and operating from within each of the member states, taking advantage, in a pragmatic and non-ideological way, of any crisis or vulnerability seems both effective and efficient.

Thus, Russia feeds both the populist left and the xenophobic right. Its aim is to spread division and distrust among disenchanted audiences, taking advantage of the context created by the crisis and existing prejudices.⁶ Hence RT and Sputnik give space to any politician with an anti-EU or anti-NATO agenda from the xenophobic right – represented by Nigel Farage of UKIP or Marine Le Pen of the Front National – to the populist left of Javier Couso of Izquierda Unida. It is also very frequent to give space to pseudo-experts, some without any other known background than being commentators on RT, Sputnik or Hispan TV.⁷ Others, like the Holocaust denier Ryan Dawson, are portrayed by RT as human rights "activists", while the neo-Nazi Manuel Ochsenteiter is introduced as "an analyst on the Middle East" (Pomerantsev & Weiss 2014: 15).

The generated content is freely disseminated on YouTube with the aim of flooding social networks. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that Facebook allows the audience to be segmented by preferences and opinions. This platform is increasingly the main means by which the bulk of the population gets informed. According to a study by the Pew Center in May 2016, 62% of the adult population in the US currently use this social network as a source of news (Gottfried and Shearer, 2016). If we take into account i) the saturation of Facebook with fake news about Hillary Clinton during the election campaign (Silverman, 2016), ii) the narrow margin of just one point by which the electoral result was decided in four key states (Wisconsin, Michigan,

4. Communication by email with the press office of *Sputnik News* on May 23 2017.

5. Especially in the opinion columns by invited authors in "Russia Beyond The Headlines".

6. The (fake) "Lisa case" about the 13-year-old Russian girl who was allegedly kidnapped and raped by three Muslim refugees is a good example.

7. Hispan TV is an Iranian state-owned news channel.

Florida and Pennsylvania), and iii) the ability to artificially amplify and orient narratives through the use of automated accounts on Twitter by actors such as the Internet Research Agency (IRA), known as the St. Petersburg trolls factory, it is easy to see the destabilising potential this machinery and these practices entail for any electoral process that takes place in a free and democratic environment. That is to say, the Kremlin takes advantage of the open Euro-Atlantic framework, converting a democratic strength into a potential strategic vulnerability. At the same time it tries to turn Russia into a digital fortress with traffic and contents strongly controlled by the state and with severe penalties for any minimum infringement of the legislative framework adopted.

RT, Sputnik in Spanish

RT launched its Spanish version in 2009. According to Victoria Vorontsova, director of the Spanish channel, "RT is already watched by some 70 million people in 38 countries around the world. In 10 European countries, including Spain, there are 36 million viewers a week, and the Spanish channel is part of the state broadcaster networks in Argentina and Venezuela. Its contents are as well included in the programming of national channels in Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Mexico and other Latin American countries".⁸ Again, it is difficult to verify the accuracy of these figures; however, RT in Spanish is aimed at a global audience of more than 550 million speakers, including about 40 million in the US.⁹ In addition, the Twitter account of the Spanish channel has almost 3 million followers and the Spanish version of its website reaches 24 million page views per month, 15% of which come from Spain, largely redirected from social networks.

Regarding Sputnik's Spanish service, the teams "work mainly from Montevideo, Madrid and Moscow, keeping in close contact with Sputnik journalists from all over the world to [produce] relevant stories for a Spanish-speaking audience". The company declines to discuss the content of the economic agreements reached with Spanish media such as *Público*. When asked about it, the corporation replies: "We only discuss commercial figures with possible commercial partners".¹⁰ It is also worth mentioning the agreements reached by Sputnik with the Costa Rican newspaper *El País* and the Nicaraguan newspaper *El Nuevo Diario* under very advantageous conditions for these journals. The Russian agency also signed a cooperation agreement in March 2017 with the Cuban news agency Prensa Latina in an attempt to boost "the development of Sputnik in Latin America", in the words of its editor in Cuba, Sergey Kochetkov.¹¹

Likewise, the ironclad internal control of the information carried out in both RT and Sputnik is noteworthy. When one of the authors of this article contacted RT's board of directors for a report on the impact of their service in Spanish, they immediately issued a circular prohibiting their staff from speaking with other media, even those reporters willing to give a positive view of their work in the broadcaster. Likewise attempts to interview journalists working for the Sputnik service in Spanish were unsuccessful: the management vetoed these interviews, submitting a standard communication via email in which "official" information about the agency is provided.

8. Interview with Victoria Vorontsova by email in January 2017.

9. According to the Instituto Cervantes, 472 million people speak Spanish as their mother tongue. If those with limited competence and those learning it are included then the number increases to 567 million, including 42 million native speakers in the US and 15 million with limited competence. See: "El español: una lengua viva: Informe 2016," Instituto Cervantes, https://cvc.cervantes.es/lengua/espanol_lengua_viva/pdf/espanol_lengua_viva_2016.pdf.

10. Communication by email with the press office of Sputnik News, on May 23, 2017.

11. See: http://www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1490111511_29807.html.

In any case, in contexts such as Latin America, the influence of these media is not negligible. The Venezuelan TV teleSUR directly picks up the RT signal in Spanish for several hours a day, which increases its penetration in several countries of the continent. This places its contents among the most watched in Cuba, where most households do not have access to other television stations except those authorised by the government itself, as is the case with teleSUR. In addition, more than 660 small cable TV providers offer RT in Spanish throughout the American continent and Spain, and some 70 local or national channels fill spaces with their content, according to the coverage data of the chain itself, which also claims to be present in 315 Spanish hotels.¹²

In the Latin American environment, the stance of these media is clearly on the political left, unlike other versions, such as the RT portals in French and German, where the ideas related to the xenophobic right are further enhanced, which has put them in the spotlight since the “shift to the right” experienced by numerous governments in Latin America. In June 2016 Mauricio Macri’s administration ordered the suspension of this channel’s broadcasts on the Argentine Digital Television system (agreed by President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and Vladimir Putin himself in 2014), a politically motivated decision in the eyes of most observers.¹³ The measure was reversed after the intervention of the Russian Foreign Ministry and intense diplomatic work from Moscow.

The populist left on both sides of the Atlantic usually welcomes the rise of media like RT in Spanish because it offers a platform to amplify its messages. This sector of the left considers that “the multimedia concentration favours the manipulation of messages as the censorship laws imposed by governments [and] the free flow of information [entails] in practice the freedom to monopolize certain markets” (Quirós, 1995: 7).¹⁴ This paradigm explains the interpretation of RT as an extension of the “voices of the debate” and, additionally, as a TV channel that claims to give voice to views that are alternative to and critical of the establishment. It is perfectly summarised by Érika Ortega Sanoja, RT correspondent in Venezuela in her presentation on RT’s website: “RT is a counterweight: an alternative to the transnational hegemonic media that have turned disinformation into a weapon of war. Thus, to practice journalism in this important broadcaster means to be part, as the Liberator Simón Bolívar said, of the ‘artillery of thought’”.¹⁵

However, the Spanish versions of RT and Sputnik have been used for disinformation operations of the highest relevance and impact, such as the fake Spanish air traffic controller, Carlos Spainbuca, who offered information/alternative facts from his alleged location at the Boryspil Airport in Kiev on the crashing of flight MH17 in July 2014. Despite the fact that the Carlos case had already been debunked, President Putin himself did not hesitate to refer to him as a reliable source during Oliver Stone’s interview in September 2015 (Schreck, 2017). Thus, NATO and EU member states such as Spain face an exceptionally disturbing challenge which threatens to convert strengths such as the free flow of information and the open and plural nature of European societies into a strategic vulnerability.

12. See: <https://actualidad.rt.com/acerca/cobertura>.

13. Just few days later, June 29, Macri ordered the cancellation of teleSUR broadcasting as well.

14. Against this background the famous statement made by Pablo Iglesias, leader of the Podemos party, that the “existence of privately owned media is an attack against freedom of speech” can be understood. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebJKDckwUhE>.

15. See: <https://actualidad.rt.com/equipo/view/205904-erika-sanoja>. This correspondent’s profile is particularly noteworthy. She is not only expressing open support for a Bolivarian agenda but takes part actively in politics as a member of the National Assembly as representative of the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV). A TV anchor in the US, Eva Golinger, also has this mixed profile of journalist and activist, but the team members of RT in Spanish are mostly young journalists with no significant previous professional track record and apparently very limited knowledge of Russia.

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WAR IN PEACETIME: COPING WITH TODAY'S RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

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"War puts nations to the test. Just as mummies fall to pieces the moment they are exposed to the air, so war pronounces its sentence of death on those social institutions which have become ossified."

It is over 150 years since Karl Marx wrote these prescient words. Much of his thinking has been discredited since then, but his understanding of the revolutionising impact of war on society has been proved correct. His understanding was based on the appreciation that the most important feature of war, particularly large-scale and protracted war, was that it was usually accompanied by much more rapid and profound social, economic and technological change than was the case in peacetime. It was this drastic, revolutionising change which overtook the ability of institutions to adapt and stay fit for purpose, and brought about their collapse.

If war is change, then to all intents and purposes the world is at war, because we are living through a period of change more widespread, rapid and profound than we have ever experienced outside a world war. Moreover, this change has been sustained longer than any world war of the last two centuries, and it is still increasing. But because this is not a shooting war like 1939–45, we in "Western" countries have not adopted the "wartime mentality" essential if we are to cope with the instability drastic change inevitably brings. We are now trying to cope in a wartime situation but with a peacetime mentality, peacetime institutions and peacetime procedures shaped by the last 70 years of living in a stable, secure, rules-based environment. We have quite naturally selected our leaders – politicians, corporate CEOs and boards, even our generals – for their abilities to shine in a "peacetime" environment. As a result, we are now in trouble.

This is not a unique situation, but it is new to many holding office today. It is best understood through a military example. If we think back to

1939 and study the British battalion and divisional commanders who were in command of their units and formations on the day war started for the UK, September 3rd, only a small fraction of these individuals were still in command three months later. This was because the skills, abilities, attitude, mentality and behaviour we need from an officer in peacetime are radically different from those we need in wartime. When the war ended, many officers who had had wonderful military careers could not cope with peacetime conditions and became ineffectual misfits whose careers failed because their wartime skills did not suit peacetime.

This, I would argue, is exactly analogous to the situation in which Western societies find themselves today. The speed of global change has outpaced all our national and international institutions. They are now becoming obsolete. They have been unable to react and adapt fast enough to remain fit for purpose. There is an excellent example in the English education system, which knows how many IT specialists are needed nationally but does not produce them, instead producing 30,000 graduates in Media Studies a year for only 500 jobs. Problems like this are often recognised, yet nobody does anything to change things because the system resists change due to inbuilt vested interest and inertia. It is just too much effort and, with peacetime mentalities, it just does not matter enough.

This inability to recognise the problem we have and acknowledge its cause – our inability to adapt our institutions because they have become so strong and inflexible – is paralysing our social, economic and political system. It applies in government even more than it applies in the corporate boardroom. It even applies in armies as we prepare to fight the latest war and fail, and fail again. In 1963 Professor Leon Megginson, interpreting Darwin in societal terms (and in a quotation often attributed to Darwin himself), put it most succinctly: “It is not the strongest of the species that survives ... It is the one that is most adaptable to change”.

Now we should be learning from our failures but we are not, because today we only record lessons, we do not learn from them and amend our procedures and our institutions as we should. Institutional resistance to change is just too strong; political correctness too widely enforced; “Performance Management”, with its corrosive ideology of self over team spirit, is just too entrenched.

So if we consider what qualities and characteristics we need in those whom we select for leadership today, in a period of rapid and profound change, in all sorts of institutions, the conclusion is that we need to look for people who have abilities that suit a wartime environment rather than a peacetime one. The Russian President Vladimir Putin is a good example. With his KGB background and exposure to the corrupting influence of money in East Germany, combined with his cleverness, ruthlessness and ambition, he rose to the top during the turmoil, vicious free-for-all and extreme violence that characterised Russia in the 1990s. This process of natural selection rewarded his “wartime” mentality – his capacity to deal with complexity, instability and uncertainty. Compare his ability to achieve his policy objectives in today’s turbulent international system with that of many Western leaders, and his willingness to use all forms of power in pursuit of his aims. Putin needs a “wartime” environment if he is to thrive. He has not hesitated to create such an environment when it suits him.

In each case, the qualities we need are not a straight choice between clear alternatives, not exclusively one thing or the other. Rather, think of a cursor on a line between two related qualities, and moving the cursor along the line so that it is closer to the wartime position than to the peacetime.

The first quality requires a change in the balance between training and education. In peacetime, we can maximise training because we have slow development. In a period of slow change, experience is our best help. So we ask for proof of everything. Evidence-based policy is what we think we need. Best practice is revered. All of these have value, of course, but all are based only on the study of the past. At a time of slow change this can be sufficient, but at a time of rapid change it is like driving down the M6 motorway and steering only while looking in the rear-view mirror.

Today, we need to move the cursor along the line away from training and towards education. Training is still necessary, but education becomes proportionately more important than before. Education differs from training in that it prepares people by enabling them to distil principles to guide their actions so that they can use an understanding of things to deal with the unexpected; because that is exactly what wartime rates of change will bring – the unexpected, the unthinkable, the unpalatable. In periods of rapid change we will be faced with the unpredictable. It will surprise us.

The second quality concerns management. In times of slow change we can *manage* everything. We can give in to the desire to *control* everything. But at times of rapid change, we cannot do that. We need to move the cursor along the line away from management towards leadership. Of course, we will always need management. But the meaning most organisations and businesses give to management today in reality is “administration”. To deal with a situation of rapid change we need leadership. *Leadership* understands that in a period of tumultuous change you cannot *control*, you have to *command*. To command means to trust and to delegate, because there is never time to monitor and check up on everything.

The third quality is risk. In peacetime we become risk-averse. Everything has to be failsafe. But in times of war or in times of rapid change, we need a system that encourages us to take risks; that allows us to make mistakes and learn from them. We have to create an environment for staff where it is safe to fail and try again. This means we must move the cursor along the line away from “error and trial” towards “trial and error”.

The fourth quality is effectiveness. Peacetime forces us to be *efficient*. It forces us to plan long term, to tie everything up for a long time so we have no reserves. But in wartime that leads to disaster because it means we are no longer flexible and cannot respond to a surprise or when things take a bad turn. It is the same in business and government during today's rapid change. Think of investments tied up long term. Think of just-in-time-delivery, which gives supermarkets and filling stations only 2 days' reserves. No flexibility results in failure.

In wartime, or at a time of rapid change, we must have a clearly articulated, long-term vision and a clear objective. Without that, short-

term thinking can lead us astray. "Tactics without strategy is just the noise before defeat", to quote Sun Tzu. But guided by that strategic understanding, we have to be able to think and act very short term indeed. For that we have to create a big slush fund of people, time and money, so we can adapt quickly and react quickly, so we are not so vulnerable to disruption. With our short-term flexibility coupled with long-term vision and a clear view of the goal we can still keep going in the right direction, even if we have to zig-zag. Strategy is not "having a big, detailed plan". Strategy is being able to adapt and react, to take advantage of a situation.

All the above means that institutions in wartime or in periods of rapid change MUST operate differently from how they do in peacetime if they are to survive or flourish.

The hierarchical structure of an organisation in peacetime is very different from in wartime. In war, you look for the people who can do things best, whatever their age or rank, and put them in there to do it. Then you listen to what they say. Stupid is the colonel who doesn't listen to his sergeant when the sergeant says "boss, things are going wrong".

This is not necessarily an issue of too many "yes-men", i.e., of a failure to challenge the boss. It may well be an organisation in which younger staff have not been able to adapt in the way their leaders can and learn to think differently. These people will not say yes – quite the opposite; they will oppose the innovator and stop them doing the drastic, necessary thing, saying instead: "No, we think you should go the old way. We don't think you should change so quickly". This is a question of understanding people's ability to take risks, to be imaginative, to be creative, to turn old tools to new tasks.

The institutions of the West have been slow to react to this new reality. A lot of the West's competitors have not. Countries in what we condescendingly call the developing world; countries like Russia and China; sub-state actors like Al-Qaeda or Islamic State: all have learned more rapidly than we have how to cope with today's instability, complexity and rapid change. They are presenting us now not with a crisis, which will pass, but with a strategic challenge, which we are not matching up to because we are trying to deal with it tactically. These countries and organisations want to set up their own alternative world system to rival ours. We are today in a constant, existential competition with these and all other actors in the global ecosystem, be they nation states, sub-state groups or big corporations. Our success in this competition will only be guaranteed if we learn to cope with change as they have. Change is war. To paraphrase yet another unpopular Russian revolutionary, Leon Trotsky: "You may not be interested in this war, but this war is interested in you."

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