



Where and How Russia Will Strike Next

White Paper

22 January 2019, V1

Prepared by SMA, Inc., for the
Undersecretary of Defense for Policy

Introduction

It is all too easy to respond to, tit-for-tat, or to largely disregard the latest Russian misbehavior. Or a more considered and deliberate grand design could be the appropriate U.S. policy. These decisions should be set in the context of a strategic backdrop beyond reflex responses. That is the premise of this policy White Paper: not to condemn or excuse Russia under Vladimir Putin but to understand it in the search for better policy, one with less risk of misunderstanding and inadvertent escalation. This paper offers an evaluation of where Russia is most likely to intervene next and how. The analysis presented in this paper is requisite context for considering implications to current U.S. policy. We first consider the immanent characteristics of the Russian perspective, and ours as dueling narratives. Understanding the motivations underlying our current manifestation of the global U.S.-Russia rivalry is essential to the questions at hand. With this context, we present an analysis of vulnerabilities as “what has to be true” for a specific country or region to be a likely target for Russian incursion. This approach exposes the assumptions and threshold conditions to answer the question of “where next”. Finally, we assess for the most likely targets, the factors that could determine Russia’s success or failure with the incursion.

Dueling Narratives

Russian initiatives have included kinetic force, as in the Ukraine, and may do so again, but the main game is a contest of competing narratives. Our narrative is that of the inevitable victory, as Kennan predicted, of democracy over autocracy, capitalism over communism. Needless to say, Putin’s view is very different. He described the fall and breakup of the Soviet Union as the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the last century.¹ He added: “Tens of millions of our co-citizens and co-patriots found themselves outside Russian territory...The moment we display weakness or spinelessness, our losses will be immeasurably greater.”

From Moscow’s perspective, and surely Putin’s, in the years after communism’s end, the United States and the West dismissed Russia. During the Cold War, we had referred, ruefully, to the Soviet Union as “Equatorial Guinea with nuclear weapons,” but after the Cold War there was some truth to the Russian belief that we treated it that way. The George H. W. Bush administration did a masterful job of handling the Cold War’s end, and there was no formal agreement, in the Budapest agreements of 1994 or anywhere else, committing NATO not to expand beyond the unified Germany and or even to Russia’s borders. Still, both President Bush and Secretary of State James Baker, said things to their counterparties that seemed to imply some such commitment.

Surely, NATO expansion during the 1990s is regarded by Russians not just as a “broken promise” but as an affront to national dignity inflicted on them at a time when Russia was weak both economically and militarily. The accession of the Baltic States in 2004, which border the Russian Federation, was seen as a threat. The subsequent events in Georgia in 2008 should be viewed in that context. What we regarded as straightforward intervention—but didn’t do much about—was for Russia an attempt to undermine the government of Mikheil Saakashvili, which was very pro-Western and sought to become part of NATO; Russia acted lest another nation on its border defect into the Western alliance.

¹ BBC News, “Putin deplores collapse of USSR,” 25 April 2005, Retrieved 20 December 2018 from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4480745.stm>; and Kattie Sanders, “Did Vladimir Putin call the breakup of the USSR ‘the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century?’”, *PundiFact*, 6 March 2014: <https://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2014/mar/06/john-bolton/did-vladimir-putin-call-breakup-ussr-greatest-geop/>. The English version from the Kremlin archives uses the word “disaster.” The [Associated Press](#) translation substituted “catastrophe.”

More generally, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Russian people looked to the West for hope and guidance. What they got was a decade of disappointment and economic mismanagement (including by Western advisors). Not just Putin but most Russians felt their dignity as a large country and erstwhile superpower was stripped from them, and that the West, rightly or wrongly, took advantage of them. It was thus understandable that Russians would turn to a strongman nationalist like Putin. His support has dropped in the last year with additional rounds of Russian sanctions and a sagging economy, but his narrative of Russia again playing a large role on the world stage remains dominant. In March 2014, after the annexation of Crimea and the intervention in Ukraine, his approval rating at home was a stunning 87 percent.

While Russians and Russian leadership are not yearning to recreate the Soviet Union, they do care about their position, role, and influence in the world and especially in what they call their “near abroad.” Their influence in the near abroad not only gives them back a sense of status as a large power but also gives them a buffer against what they view as the expansionist West. From the Russian point of view, much of what we regard as aggressive, Russians see as defensive. The West and the United States are the aggressors and since the fall of the Berlin Wall have been pushing a policy of encirclement vis-à-vis the Russian Federation. Taking this perspective into consideration helps explain how Russia has responded to tension and conflict in the Baltics, the Ukraine and Georgia.

With no apparent drumbeat for a new “Soviet Union,” the West would be naïve to think there is no appeal to such a Russian future. Vladimir Putin² has described the fall and breakup of the Soviet Union as the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe³” of the last century⁴. He declared: “Tens of millions of our co-citizens and co-patriots found themselves outside Russian territory.” He added: “The moment we display weakness or spinelessness, our losses will be immeasurably greater.” Current US National Security Advisor and former UN ambassador John Bolton has offered an explanation for Russia’s aggressive posture, “He [Putin] gave us notice of his strategy seven or eight years ago when he said, in what is now one of the most frequently repeated quotes from his leadership in Russia, ‘The breakup of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century.’ It’s clear he wants to re-establish Russian hegemony within the space of the former Soviet Union.”⁵

Putin’s, and Russia’s approach to Ukraine is similar to its approach to Georgia, though the situation is more complex. The country, after all, was the core of “Kievan Rus” more than a thousand years ago. It is also, as we know, divided between a pro-European western part (around 60 percent) and a pro-Russian eastern part (perhaps around 40 percent). The events surrounding the Maidan Uprising are seen by Russia as American and Western efforts to get rid of the legitimately elected Viktor Yanukovich, who was leaning toward an economic alliance with Moscow as opposed to the European Union. The newly installed pro-Western government subsequently implemented anti-ethnic Russian policies and in addition was seeking, in Russia’s view, military support from the West to subjugate the ethnic Russian Eastern part of the Ukraine. The Russians felt they had to respond to protect their Russian ethnic compatriots, and at the same time sought to safeguard their access to the Black Sea by taking back Crimea.

² BBC News, “Putin deplors collapse of USSR,” April 25, 2005, Retrieved December 20, 2018 from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4480745.stm>

³ Kattie Sanders, “Did Vladimir Putin call the breakup of the USSR ‘the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century?’”, *PunditFact*, March 6, 2014: <https://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2014/mar/06/john-bolton/did-vladimir-putin-call-breakup-ussr-greatest-geop/>

⁴ See Sanders, K. The English version from the Kremlin archives uses the word “disaster.” The *Associated Press* translation substituted “catastrophe.”

⁵ *Ibid.*

Against this backdrop, Moscow will strongly resist either Georgia or Ukraine joining NATO. They will use kinetic force if necessary, which would probably lead in the case of the Ukraine to a divided country after a protracted civil war. In the case of Georgia, the Russians believe there is very little the United States and NATO can do militarily to counter any conventional action by the Russians. For Russia, adhesion to NATO is distinct from enlargement of the EU. NATO is a military organization, effectively guided by Washington, that is viewed as a threat on the borders. By contrast, enlargement of the EU that might include countries on Russia's borders is not viewed as a threat. In fact, that enlargement might be favorable if it lets Russia influence EU policy from within. The EU's consensus decision-making makes it easy for Russia to disrupt EU policies through its influence on Hungary, Greece, and other countries on specific issues.

The Russian view of the Baltics is very different from that of Ukraine and Georgia. The Russians have accepted that NATO is now on their border with the membership of the Baltic States. They do not like it but see it as manageable. However, they will continue to support their ethnic brethren in these countries by creating disruptions (as they have done in Lithuania) when policies unfairly discriminate against ethnic Russians. At the same time, they also count on the EU's emphasis on equal rights prevailing, thereby allowing ethnic Russians in the EU to prosper. In fact, they believe that Russians, wherever they are living, will always maintain some connection and allegiance to Mother Russia. They do not worry about alienation of the Russian diaspora.

The case of Syria is a separate issue altogether. For a long time after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it was the only foothold that Russia had in the Middle East. However, since the increasing terrorist threat from Al Qaeda and ISIS, the Russians view Syria as a red line in preventing the expansion of extremist Wahhabi Islam northwards toward Russia's near abroad and Russia itself. Approximately 15 percent of the Russian population is Muslim by faith, yet for the vast majority, they are first and foremost Russian and only secondarily Muslim.

Were that to change because of the influence of Wahhabism, Russia would have a massive Chechnya-like problem within its borders. It is a red line and Russia will do what it takes to prevent ISIS, or Qatari/Saudi sponsored Sunni extremism to take root. That also translates into the general Russian strategy in the Middle East of seeking to be the balancing power, friendly with everyone (e.g. with Iran and Israel, with Saudi and Qatar, with Turkey and the UAE), and to avoid conflict lest the breakdown of governance in particular states again give ISIS an opportunity to prosper.

Where and How Next: Assessing Vulnerabilities

Better understanding Russia's perspective does not, to be sure, settle policy issues. How and where Russia might intervene next still needs to be asked. As does how the United States and NATO should respond. The *how* of Russian intervention has been a variety of tools in what is variously called "hybrid" or "gray zone"⁶ threats, among other names. These approaches generally avoid kinetic force, though occasionally, as in Ukraine, will include kinetic force. Instruments are used simultaneously, and their target is opposing societies, not armies. Most of the tools, from money to political parties to proxy combatants ("little green men") are not new. What is new are cyber tools and social-media aided propaganda, both of which dramatically lower the entry cost (e.g. planting an article in a foreign newspaper during the Cold War was hard and expensive; now, trolls can simply post the article, with bots seeking to make it "trend").

⁶ Joseph Votel, C.T. Cleveland., C.T. Connett, and W. Irwin, "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone," Joint Force Quarterly 80 (1st Quarter, January 2016) National Defense University Press, Retrieved 31 December 2018 from: <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/JFQ/Joint-Force-Quarterly-80/Article/643108/unconventional-warfare-in-the-gray-zone/>

Russian use of cyberattack runs back at least to the 2007 distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack on Estonia. Newer sets of these tools were vividly on display during the 2016 US election.⁷ Russia hacked into Democratic Party and candidate Clinton's emails, then selectively released them through surrogates, timing strategically to distract attention from, for instance, the Democratic convention or candidate Trump's "groping" remarks. Social media-aided propaganda sought to get fake news—of Clinton's illness, for instance—to trend and thus be picked up by mainstream news outlets. The efforts sought to exacerbate existing political divides, encouraging African Americans to boycott the elections or Latino Americans to distrust US institutions. Putin and Russia didn't create the divisions; rather they sought to magnify them.

Thus, thinking about what next begins with triggers and vulnerabilities. As the cases of Georgia and Ukraine indicate, moves toward joining NATO are one obvious trigger for Russian actions. Proximity, hence easy Russian access, plus a significant Russian-speaking population are sources of vulnerability (see Figure 1). We considered countries such as Syria and Libya but did not include them here, either because Russia is visibly active there (Syria) or sees no gain worth the risk (Libya). Of the six countries with the highest population of ethnic Russians, Belarus enjoys close ties with Russia. While there have been disputes over the distribution of natural gas and Belarus' desire not to host a Russian military base, Belarus has shown no interest in joining NATO or the EU. Even so, recent diplomatic dust ups between Belarus's President Lukashenko and Putin over Belarus's decision to pursue a visa-free policy for travel through Belarus is an issue for Russia. This, however, may be simply a family squabble. So, too, Kazakhstan is not particularly vulnerable either, for while possessing a large ethnic Russian population, the country, "a huge territory [was] stitched together by the communists in a completely haphazard fashion," has vast empty spaces that are not densely populated and qualifies as an "artificial entity" with limited Russian ethnocentricity.⁸ Recent agreements of cooperation between Azerbaijan and Russia have been lauded by Russian as a very positive development in Azerbaijani–Russian relations. *Azernews* in a September 2018 article explained, "Speaking of the prospects for the intensification of cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan in ensuring regional security, the spokeswoman noted that the mechanism of discussing security issues between Azerbaijan and Russia works smoothly."⁹ Consequently, Azerbaijan does not appear to be in Russia's crosshairs for aggressive attention.

Absent the trigger of NATO membership, Ukraine suffers a "frozen conflict," one with just enough military conflict to keep the country a basket-case, but not enough to result in a conclusive outcome. For example, despite action late last year by Russia in seizing three Ukrainian ships and imprisoning the crews, Ukraine and Russia seem stalemated.

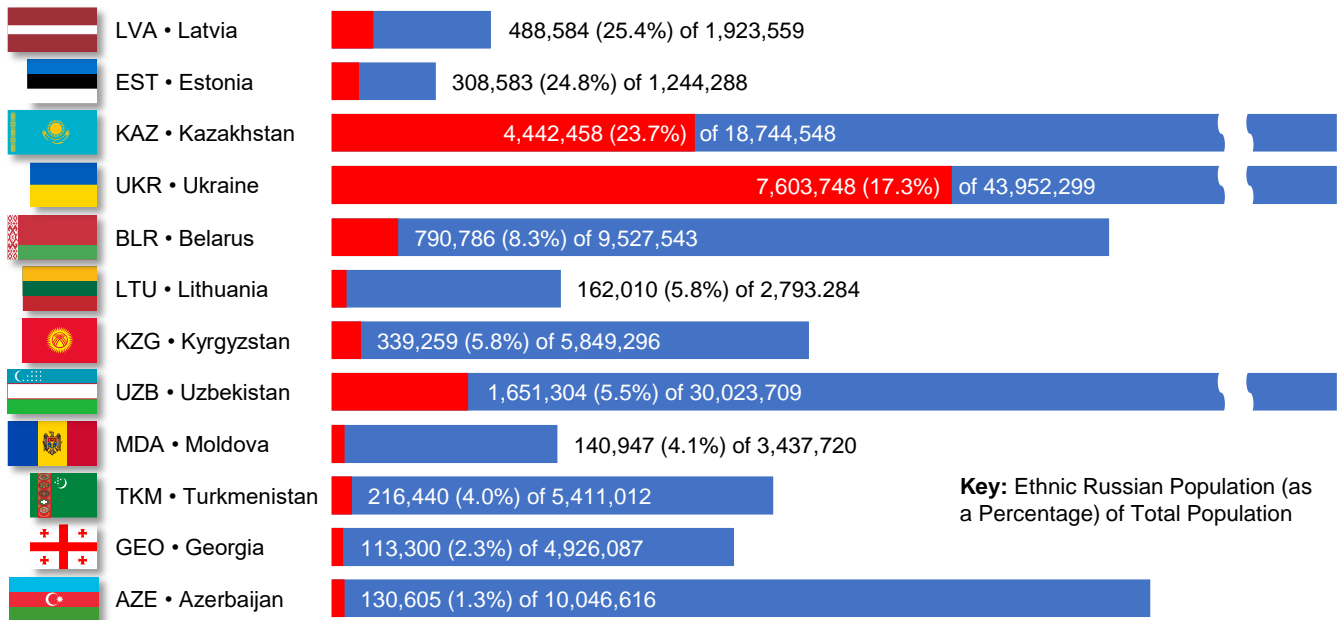
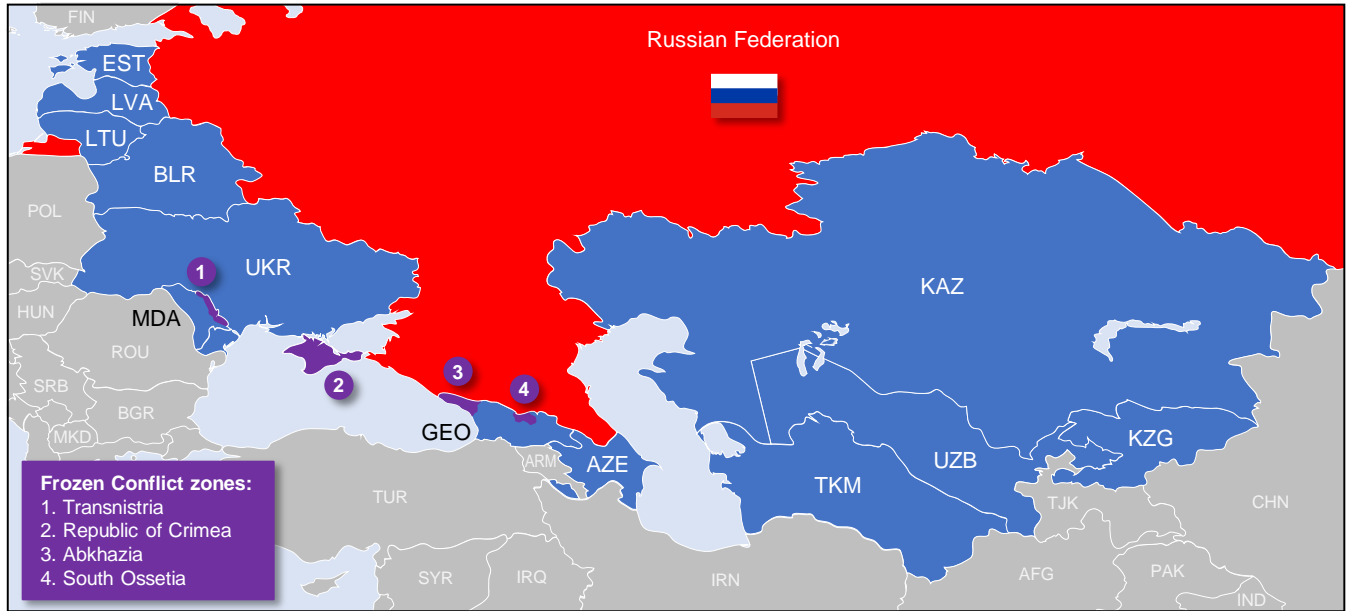
⁷ Philip N. Howard, Bharath Ganesh, and Dimitra Liotsiou, "The IFA, Social Media and Political Polarization in the United States, 2012-2018," Computational Propaganda Research Project, Research based on data provided by the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Retrieved 20 December 2018 from:

<https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/534-oxford-russia-internet-research-agency/c6588b4a7b940c551c38/optimized/full.pdf>

⁸ Michel Casey, "Interview with Gerard Toal: Why Does Russia Invade Its Neighbors?" *The Diplomat*, 14 August 2017, Retrieved 9 January 2019 from: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/08/interview-with-gerard-toal-why-does-russia-invade-its-neighbors/>

⁹ Azernews, "Russia enthusiastic about development of relations with Azerbaijan," 7 September 2018. Retrieved 19 January 2019, from: <https://www.azernews.az/nation/137256.html>

Figure 1: Russia's Neighboring Countries by Ethnic Russian Population



Key: Ethnic Russian Population (as a Percentage) of Total Population

* Source for population statistics is the CIA Fact Book July 2018 census
 ** Population for Georgia does not include South Ossetia or Abkhazia

That leaves the Baltics. Latvia has the largest percentage of its population ethnic Russians. While Latvia has remained a stronghold of pluralism, a recent Pew Research Center report found that ethnic Russians in Latvia agree that “a strong Russia is necessary to balance Western influence” by margin of 64% to 29%. Further, 70% of ethnic Russians polled responded that Russia had an obligation “to protect ethnic Russians outside its borders.” The data indicates an undercurrent of discontent.¹⁰

¹⁰ Pew Research Center, 21 July 2017, “Ethnic Russians more likely than other in their countries to favor ‘strong Russia.’” Retrieved 28 December 2018 from: www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/07/24/ethnic-russians-in-some-former-soviet-republics-feel-a-close-connection-to-russia/ft_17-07-21_ethnicrussians/

Estonia has been attacked and is very much on alert. It hosts the second largest population of ethnic Russians among the three Baltic states. Russian speaking Estonians had been left out of the Estonian mainstream, but things are changing; “The Ukraine conflict acted as a wake-up call... It helped focus the nation’s attention on the issue of Russian speakers’ loyalty... Do they feel at home here? Do they feel loyal to the Estonian state?”

“In conclusion, the overall current situation in the region is that Kaliningrad Oblast reflects a classical security dilemma: Russia seeks to build a military force near Lithuania and Poland, to which the latter states answer by demanding greater visibility of NATO in the region, which in turn provokes Moscow to increase the militarization of the oblast even more, thus connecting possible demilitarization with maintaining the Baltic States within the “grey area” of NATO.”¹¹

In 2014, Russia raised the specter of another invasion as it mobilized 9,000 ground troops and 55 naval vessels for military field exercise in Kaliningrad. The exercise was to train for the protection of Kaliningrad and its Russian citizens. But there’s a fine line between exercising to defend territory and to seize it. The Russian message was not lost on the Lithuanians, all the less so given the sticking point with Russia over “visa-free” travel for those in Kaliningrad transiting Lithuania to Russia and back, a privilege withdrawn when Lithuania entered the EU.

Russia has made clear that the Baltics are a top national security concern. Its ZAPAD 2017 exercise, with air defense and offensive air operations, conventional operations, unconventional operations, anti-access, deep strike and reservist training, was designed to counter NATO operational concepts. Staging the exercise in the Baltic States’ indicated that while Russia is militarily inferior to NATO, it can be formidable in its backyard.

Proximity was central to the message. Figure 2 portrays those countries with the most vulnerability for to a Russian hybrid warfare attack. The Ukraine is most vulnerable as that country is currently engaged in hostilities with the Russians. The Baltics are also very vulnerable with Lithuania, perhaps the most vulnerable of the three. The least likely targets are Kazakhstan and Belarus as the analysis indicates they are already largely in the Russian sphere of influence.

Research for this paper revealed that where Russia’s behavior portended some manner of attack, four conditions were present. First, as mentioned above proximity is important, since moving military forces where they can be intimidating is easier. Additionally, as was the case with the Ukraine and Georgia, infiltrating paramilitary forces is much simpler and more easily made clandestine.

Second, membership in NATO as well as economic ties to the West is vexing to the Russians as it is a significant reminder of what Russia believes to be military and economic threats reminiscent of the “Cold War” pointed at Russia. Third, countries having a foreign policy that desires closer ties with the West. Fourth, and the excuse for Russia’s aggressive behavior, is the presence of a significant percentage of ethnic Russians in the population. Where all four of these conditions are present, relations between Russia its potential target are strained.

¹¹ Vilius Ivanauskas, Vytautas Kerisanskas, and Laurymas Kasciunas, “Kaliningrad Factor in Lithuanian—Russian Relations: Implications to the Security Issues of Lithuania,” *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 2016-2017, Vol. 15: <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/lasr.2017.15.issue-1/lasr-2017-0006/lasr-2017-0006.pdf>

Figure 2: Indicators of Vulnerability.

Potential Target Countries	Proximity	Member of EU or NATO	Desiring Closer Ties to West	Significant Population of Ethnic Russians	Relationship with Russia	Combine Vulnerability Potential	Rational for Vulnerability Potential
Latvia	●	●	●	●	◐	◐	Very vulnerable: borders Russia; NATO/EU member; largest percentage ethnic Russians perceived as marginalized; desires ties to West
Estonia	●	●	●	●	◐	◐	Very vulnerable: borders Russia; NATO/EU member; large percentage ethnic Russians; first of Baltics to be cyberattacked; desires ties to West
Lithuania	●	●	●	◐	◐	◐	Very vulnerable: borders Russia; NATO/EU member; vocal ethnic Russians; separates Russia from Kaliningrad; no visa-free travel; desires ties to West
Kazakhstan	●	○	◐	◐	◐	◐	Slightly vulnerable: close military ties with Russia; reluctant to align with West; dispersed population of ethnic Russians; no serious initiative to join NATO/EU
Ukraine	●	○	●	◐	●	●	Most vulnerable in current, continuous conflict with Russia. Potential for Russia to increase military activity is high, with high percentage of ethnic Russians
Belarus	●	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	Slightly vulnerable, but Russia has tight rein keeping solidly in Russian camp. Occasionally Belarus attempts independence but not persistently.
Moldova	◐	○	◐	◐	◐	◐	Somewhat vulnerable: no Russia border; less than 5% ethnic Russians; foreign policy seen as East vs. West. Unstable political environment, not worth investment.
Georgia	●	◐	◐	◐	●	◐	Very vulnerable having been previously invaded. Georgia without South Ossetia & Abkhazia has low percentage of ethnic Russians, but Russian troops in close proximity

KEY: Most vulnerable ● Very vulnerable ◐ Somewhat vulnerable ◐ Slightly vulnerable ◐ Not vulnerable ○

Figure 2 assesses these countries based on criteria that makes them vulnerable to Russian aggression by means of hybrid warfare. Looking at Russia’s previous behavior, proximity (common border); being a member of NATO/EU; having a foreign policy that expressing a desire to become closer to the West; the impact of a significant percentage of ethnic Russian in the population; all influence a countries relationship with Russia. The Ukraine and Georgia are under either persistent attack or significant continuous political pressure and are Most Vulnerable and Very Vulnerable respectively. Since these countries are in continuous peril, they would not be considered “next” to experience Russian border intrusion or “gray zone” warfare.

Belarus and Kazakhstan are either already aligned with Russia, militarily, culturally, or both, and for Russia to exert any additional influence is simply not worth the investment. The same is true for Moldova: the effort to make Moldova more included in the Russian orbit is not worth the investment. Moldova’s foreign policy remains an “East vs. West geopolitical competition.”¹² There is some residual pique on the part of Russia following Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin’s refusal to sign the “Kozak Memorandum” that Russia favored and would have given the breakaway region Transnistria “veto power over Moldovan foreign policy and security decisions.”¹³ Currently, Russian troops are present in

¹² *Moldovan Politic*, “Moldova’s Foreign and Security Policy Vulnerabilities,” June 25, 2018. Retrieved January 19, 2019 from: <https://moldovanpolitics.com/category/moldovan-russian-relations/>

¹³ *Ibid.*

Transnistria and not likely to leave. Consequently, “lack of political will, coupled with Russian propaganda efforts, keep Moldova in a dysfunctional state of neutrality.”¹⁴

Based on recent history, the Russian actions to watch for that presage conventional forces invading are:

1. Disinformation campaigns aimed at creating fear and discontent among ethnic Russians by spreading fake news as well as propaganda supporting both sides of issues to create confusion and distrust of media or government reporting as to the facts.
2. Sending irregular forces to infiltrate local residents’ establishments and institutions, including police stations, schools and essential service infrastructures.
3. Positioning ground forces near the target’s borders, under the guise of military exercises or training.
4. Instigating social unrest, civil discord, protests and riots.

Prerequisites for Russia’s Success and Other Considerations

Will Russia’s intervention succeed? Five preconditions seem critical:

1. Local military advantage;
2. US and NATO interests at stake not vital;
3. Ease of entering social networks through social media;
4. Pre-existing political and social divisions in the target country that can be exacerbated; and
5. Vulnerability in the target’s cyber realm.

In perhaps Russia’s most successful gray zone intervention thus far, its attacks in the 2016 US elections, all the preconditions save military advantage were present. To be sure, US interests at stake were vital, but since the attacks came as a surprise (even though they shouldn’t have), the stakes were not perceived as vital. Taking Russia’s perspective into account, and considering their possible actions as reactions, not as proactively aggressive, can begin to be strategic in the sense of asking “what if?” and “what next?” The goal is to make the U.S DoD policy position perfectly clear while making certain to avoid measures that needlessly escalate tension. Think, for instance of reactions to:

- **Next wave of sanctions:** No matter how much (or little) sanctions have so far hurt Russians, the next set, which consider excluding Russia from the international banking system, will bite. Those will be viewed much more seriously by the Kremlin and may trigger retaliation in the form of an attack in the US financial system. They also have the unintended side effect of push Russia to extract itself from the US financial system and transacting in currencies other than dollars—thus insulating itself to some extent from future sanctions.
- **NATO troop buildup in Eastern Europe/Balkans and military exercises:** On one hand, these demonstrate commitment, even if Russia does not see them as an existential threat; on the other hand, they validate Putin’s narrative of NATO militarizing and pushing itself to Russia’s borders. The Russians will pocket that validation, and respond by disrupting, pestering, talking of escalation—responses in the gray zone short of conventional conflict.
- **Withdrawal from INF treaty and placement of nuclear warheads in Europe:** Though Russia has expressed dismay at the US withdrawal from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, short of a requirement to re-deploy such weapons in Europe as a response to Russia, DoD should make the case for withdrawal from INF as the only prudent action in a world that is no longer abiding by the irrelevant agreement. DoD need not suggest that Europe is the logical home for such weapons. DoD should be vigilant that a belief on the part of Russia that the US intends such a redeployment could prompt Russia to create havoc starting in the Balkans.

¹⁴ Ibid.

- **Stalemate in US politics:** With what is clearly a noisy element in the Democratic House perhaps seeking to impeach a Republican President, this may embolden Russia to make preemptive moves in several areas:
 - DoD needs to be focused on its National Defense Strategy (NDS) and not be diverted from executing that strategy and the complementary documents that the NDS informs.
 - Given all the other geopolitical priorities, the United States and DoD may want to give more attention and time to Libya, since Russia is already stepping into the breach. A stable and Russia-friendly Libya offers huge advantages from an energy security and defense perspective — potential for a naval base in the Mediterranean.
 - Moldova, despite the internal political turmoil, may find greater common interests with Russia and develop stronger bilateral relationship. But, at present DoD needs to be aware of developments in Moldova and where prudent be helpful.
 - Ukraine is tricky, given its upcoming presidential elections. The Russians are already funding various candidates, and in the worst-case scenario, if a pro-Western candidate is elected, Russia could create enough conflict to maintain the status quo, resulting in a drain on financial resources for the EU and the United States, if also for Russia itself.
- **Rhetorical policy:** The United States has not always been clear that, for instance, interventions in its elections are unacceptable. So, too, its commitment to NATO and Article 5 can hardly be restated often enough. Even an organizational change, like creating a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for New Generation (Gray Zone) Warfare, can demonstrate that the Department of Defense is taking these threats seriously, as well as serving as the Defense focal point for a broad approach to hybrid threats.
- **Whole of government approach:** Being more proactive in countering gray zone threats has a military component, but it requires all elements of national power to create a more coordinated set of tools and weapons to be deployed. Making sure, for instance, that sanctions don't backfire will require tools and measures involving the Departments of Treasury and State. So, too, the private sector has an important role to play both as eyes and ears for early warning and for speaking with a credibility that governments often lack.

In being more strategic about Russia, there may be value in more dialogue with Russia. But, that dialogue must be with leadership where such discussion will be productive. Surely, in the wake of Russia's election meddling and the reaction that has stirred in the United States, the dialogue has become very constricted, increasing the risk of misinterpretation and the possibility for escalation. It might behoove the Department to in fact enhance the dialogue in many of the issues and regarding many of these contentious areas to reduce the risks of escalation, and perhaps even remove some of the reasons for Russia's disruptive behavior.

Authors

Gregory F. Treverton stepped down as Chair of the US National Intelligence Council in January 2017. He is Professor of the Practice of International Relations at the University of Southern California, and an SMA Executive Advisor.

David Patterson is SMA Senior Vice President for Strategic Business Opportunities, former Executive Director at the National Defense Business Institute at the University of Tennessee, and former Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Comptroller in the Bush '43 Administration.

Ydir Vissers served as an officer with Dutch Military Intelligence focusing on political and military risk analysis. He was instrumental in building Monitor Group's practice in the Middle East where he worked for public sector clients including numerous State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs).