Europe

Russia remains an acute and formidable threat to the U.S. and its interests in Europe. From the Arctic to the Baltics, Ukraine, the South Caucasus, and increasingly the Mediterranean Sea, Russia continues to foment instability in Europe. Despite economic problems, Russia continues to prioritize the rebuilding of its military and funding for its military operations abroad. Russia's military and political antagonism toward the United States continues unabated, and its efforts to undermine U.S. institutions and the NATO alliance are serious and troubling. Russia uses its energy position in Europe along with espionage, cyberattacks, and information warfare to exploit vulnerabilities and seeks to drive wedges into the transatlantic alliance and undermine people's faith in government and societal institutions.

Overall, Russia has significant conventional and nuclear capabilities and remains the top threat to European security. Its aggressive stance in a number of theaters, including the Balkans, Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine, continues both to encourage destabilization and to threaten U.S. interests.

Russian Military Capabilities. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), among the key weapons in Russia's inventory are 313 intercontinental ballistic missiles; 2,780 main battle tanks; and more than 5,140 armored infantry fighting vehicles, more than 6,100 armored personnel carriers, and more than 4,328 pieces of artillery. The navy has one aircraft carrier; 62 submarines (including 13 ballistic missile submarines); five cruisers; 15 destroyers; 13 frigates; and 100 patrol and coastal combatants. The air force has 1,176 combat-capable aircraft. The IISS counts 280,000 members of the army. Russia also has a total reserve force of 2,000,000 for all armed forces.[1] Russian deep-sea research vessels include converted ballistic missile submarines, which hold smaller auxiliary submarines that can operate on the ocean floor.[2]

To avoid political blowback from military deaths abroad, Russia has increasingly deployed paid private volunteer troops trained at Special Forces bases and often under the command of Russian Special Forces. Russia has used such volunteers in Libya, Syria, and Ukraine because "[t]hey not only provide the Kremlin with plausible political deniability but also apparently take casualties the Russian authorities do not report."[3] In December 2017, it was reported that 3,000 mercenaries from one private company, the Wagner Group, which is closely tied to Russian President Vladimir Putin, have fought in Syria since 2015.[4]

In July 2016, Putin signed a law creating a 340,000-strong (both civilian and military) National Guard over which he has direct control.[5] He created his National Guard, which is responsible for "enforcing emergency-situation regimes, combating terrorism, defending Russian territory, and protecting state facilities and assets,"[6] by amalgamating "interior troops and various law-enforcement agencies."[7] Although Putin could issue a directive to deploy the force abroad,[8] forces are more likely to be used to stifle domestic dissent.

Hamstrung by low oil prices, economic sanctions, and deep structural issues, Russia's economy is projected to produce only tepid

growth of 1.5 percent–2.0 percent in 2018.[9] Though Russia cut defense spending by 20 percent from $70 billion in 2016 to $66.3 billion in 2017,[10] it has invested heavily in modernization of its armed forces. In January 2018, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and U.S. Marine Corps General Joseph Dunford noted that "[t]here is not a single aspect of the Russian armed forces that has not received some degree of modernization over the past decade."[11]

In early 2018, Russia introduced the new State Armament Program 2018–2027, a $306 billion investment in new equipment and force modernization. However, according to Chatham House, "as inflation has eroded the value of the rouble since 2011, the new programme is less ambitious than its predecessor in real terms."[12] A Swedish Defense Research Agency brief notes that the new armaments program is likely to be distributed more evenly between military branches and that "the emphasis of the 2018–2027 programme is on procurement of high-precision weapons for air, sea and land battle—including hypersonic missiles—unmanned air strike complexes, individual equipment for servicemen and advanced reconnaissance, communication and electronic warfare systems."[13] The new state armaments program will also focus on development of unmanned vehicles and robotics.[14]

Russia's counterspace and countersatellite capabilities are formidable. In February 2018, Director of National Intelligence Daniel R. Coats testified that "[b]oth Russia and China continue to pursue anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons as a means to reduce US and allied military effectiveness."[15]

Russia's nuclear arsenal has been progressively modernized. According to the IISS:

> The Strategic Rocket Force (RVSN) continues to progressively rearm, with a number of regiments continuing to receive new Yars missiles and launchers in 2016. Meanwhile, tests of the heavy Sarmat liquid fuel intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) have been postponed several times due to technical difficulties, and these are now expected to resume towards the end of 2017. Ejection tests of the rail-mobile Barguzin ICBM were first carried out in November 2016, but the future of the system has yet to be decided.[16]

Russia has announced that the new RS-28 ballistic missile, commissioned in 2011, will come into service in 2018 as planned. Russia also plans to deploy the RS-28 (Satan 2) ICBM by 2021 as a replacement for the RS-36, which is being phased out in the 2020s.[17]

The armed forces also continue to undergo process modernization, which was begun by Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov in 2008.[18] Partially because of this modernization, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Force Development Elbridge Colby stated in January 2018 that the U.S. military advantage over Russia is eroding.[19] Russia has invested heavily in military modernization over the past decade and projects that 70 percent of its military equipment will have been modernized by 2020.[20] In March 2017, Russia announced life-extension programs for its *Akula*-class and *Oscar II*-class nuclear-powered submarines, which operate in both the Northern and Pacific Fleets.[21] However, problems remain:

> The naval shipbuilding industry has suffered from years of neglect and under investment; while the Ukraine crisis and the imposition of sanctions is starting to have an effect. The refurbishment of existing naval vessels is progressing, albeit at a slower, and more expensive, pace than originally envisaged. Although several new frigates, corvettes and submarines have already entered service, delivery of new vessels is behind schedule.[22]

Following years of delays, the commissioning of the *Admiral Gorshkov* stealth guided missile frigate was delayed until the end of summer 2018.[23] The second *Admiral Gorshkov*-class frigate, the *Admiral Kasatonov*, began sea trials in 2018; however, according to

some analysts, tight budgets and an inability to procure parts from Ukrainian industry (importantly, gas turbine engines) make it difficult for Russia to build the three additional *Admiral Gorshkov*-class frigates as planned.[24] In April, Russia announced that its only aircraft carrier would be out of service until 2021 for modernization and repair.[25] Russia plans to procure eight *Lider*-class guided missile destroyers for its Northern and Pacific fleets, but procurement has faced consistent delay, and construction will not begin until 2025 at the earliest.[26]

Russia's naval modernization continues to prioritize submarines, including upgrades to its diesel electric *Kilo*-class subs.[27] According to one analyst:

> [R]einvigorating submarine construction has been one of the visible accomplishments of the Russian Navy's modernization program for 2011–2020. Russia has built three new SSBNs of the Borei class (Project 955) and recently launched the second SSGN in the Yasen class (Project 885M)—an upgraded version of the well-known Severodvinsk—and it intends to build five more Borei-class SSBNs by 2021 and another four or five SSGNs of the Yasen class by 2023.[28]

Russia also has expressed ambitions to produce a fifth-generation stealth nuclear-powered submarine by 2030[29] and to arm it with Zircon hypersonic missiles, which have a reported speed of from Mach 5 to Mach 6.[30]

Transport remains a nagging problem, and Russia's Defense Minister has stressed the paucity of transport vessels. In 2017, Russia reportedly needed to purchase civilian cargo vessels and use icebreakers to transport troops and equipment to Syria at the beginning of major operations in support of the Assad regime.[31]

Although budget shortfalls have hampered modernization efforts overall, analysts believe that Russia will continue to focus on developing high-end systems such as the S-500 surface-to-air missile system and Su-57 fighter and the T-14 Armata main battle tank.[32] In May, it was reported that Russian testing of the S-500 system struck a target 299 miles away. If true, this is the longest surface-to-air missile test ever conducted, and the S-500's range could have significant implications for European security when the missile becomes operational.[33]

Russian Exercises. Russian military exercises, especially snap exercises, are a source of serious concern because they have masked real military operations in the past. In 2013, Russia reintroduced snap exercises, which are conducted with little or no warning and often involve thousands of troops and pieces of equipment.[34] In February 2017, for example, Russia ordered snap exercises involving 45,000 troops, 150 aircraft, and 200 anti-aircraft pieces.[35] These exercises often encompass multiple military districts, police forces, and the new National Guard. For instance, "in March 2015, the armed forces conducted a major snap exercise of the northern fleet and its reinforcement with elements from the Central, Southern, Western and Eastern Military Districts. This was followed by a major policing exercise, Zaslon 2015."[36]

Snap exercises have been used for military campaigns as well. According to General Curtis Scaparrotti, NATO Supreme Allied Commander and Commander, U.S. European Command (EUCOM), "the annexation of Crimea took place in connection with a snap exercise by Russia."[37]

Snap exercises also provide Russian leadership with a hedge against unpreparedness or corruption. "In addition to affording combat-training benefits," the IISS reports, "snap inspections appear to be of increasing importance as a measure against corruption or deception. As a result of a snap inspection in the Baltic Fleet in June 2016, the fleet's commander, chief of staff and dozens of high-ranking officers were dismissed."[38]

In September 2017, Russia and Belarus conducted Zapad 2017, a massive exercise in Russia's Western Military District, Kaliningrad, and Belarus, the most recent iteration of which

had taken place in 2013. While Russia claimed that only 12,700 troops took part, which is 300 fewer than the 13,000 threshold that would require monitoring by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) under the Vienna Document,[39] the actual total was 60,000–70,000, with 12,000 exercises across Belarus and the rest in Russia.[40] In addition to underreporting troop numbers in its exercises, "Russia simply compartmentalizes its large-scale exercises into chunks small enough to evade Vienna Document requirements."[41] Zapad 2017 was smaller than Zapad 13 because it "focused on strengthening Command and Control (C2) and integrating forces, rather than emphasising troop displacements."[42]

While Zapad 17 was ostensibly a counterterrorism exercise, one NATO staff officer wrote that:

> The "terrorist" formations confronting the combined Russian and Belorussian forces were of sufficient size and strength to require three days of operations by combined-arms and armoured land forces with extensive fixed and rotary-wing air support, large-scale aerospace operations and engagement by the Baltic Fleet and coastal defence units.[43]

Estonian Defense Forces Commander Riho Terras stated plainly that the exercise "simulated a large-scale military attack against Nato."[44] In addition to exercises in the Western Military District, Russia exercised simultaneously in every other military district as well, including live firings of Iskander missiles deployed outside the Western Military District, and a simulated defense of Moscow by S-400s from a large-scale cruise missile attack.[45] Zapad 17 also featured Russian exercises in the Arctic region.[46]

During Zapad 17, Russia deployed Iskander missiles near the northern Norwegian border, nine miles from the town of Korpfjell.[47] Russian signal jamming during the exercise interfered with GPS signals over 150 miles from the Russian border and disrupted commercial aircraft and fishing and shipping vessels in Norway.[48]

Russian exercises in the Baltic Sea in April 2018, a day after the leaders of the three Baltic nations met with President Donald Trump in Washington, were meant as a message. Twice in April, Russia stated that it planned to conduct three days of live-fire exercises in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Latvia, which forced a rerouting of commercial aviation as Latvia closed some of its airspace.[49] Sweden issued warnings to commercial aviation and sea traffic.[50] Russia did not actually fire any live missiles,[51] and the event was described by the Latvian Ministry of Defense as "a show of force, nothing else."[52] The exercises took place near the Karlskrona Naval Base, the Swedish Navy's largest base.[53]

Threats to the Homeland

Russia is the only state adversary in the region that possesses the capability to threaten the U.S. homeland with both conventional and nonconventional means. Although there is no indication that Russia plans to use its capabilities against the United States absent a broader conflict involving America's NATO allies, the plausible potential for such a scenario serves to sustain the strategic importance of those capabilities.

Russia's National Security Strategy describes NATO as a threat to the national security of the Russian Federation:

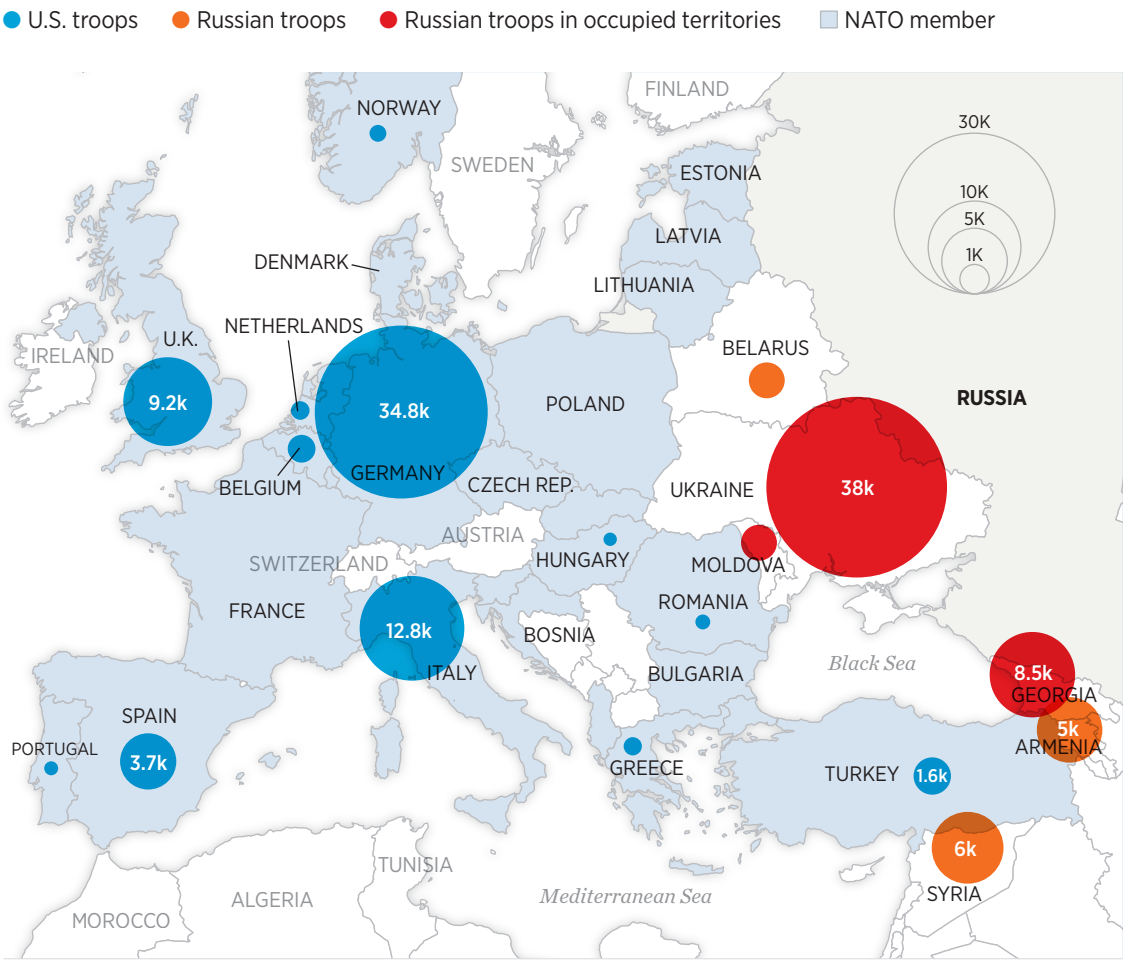
> The buildup of the military potential of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the endowment of it with global functions pursued in violation of the norms of international law, the galvanization of the bloc countries' military activity, the further expansion of the alliance, and the location of its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders are creating a threat to national security.[54]

The document also clearly states that Russia will use every means at its disposal to achieve its strategic goals: "Interrelated political,

MAP 3

U.S., Russian Troops Near NATO Nations

The U.S. maintains a permanent active-duty force of about 65,000 troops in Europe. Following its recent actions in Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine, Russia has about 61,000 troops outside its borders on NATO's perimeter.



NOTE: U.S. active-duty troops in 15 NATO nations with levels below 200 are not represented.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center, and Heritage Foundation research.

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military, military-technical, diplomatic, economic, informational, and other measures are being developed and implemented in order to ensure strategic deterrence and the prevention of armed conflicts."[55] In December 2014, Putin signed a new version of Russia's military doctrine emphasizing the claimed threat of NATO and global strike systems to Russia.[56]

Russian Strategic Nuclear Threat. Russia possesses the largest arsenal of nuclear weapons among the nuclear powers (when short-range nuclear weapons are included). It is one of the few nations with the capability to destroy many targets in the U.S. homeland and in U.S.-allied nations and to threaten and prevent free access to the commons by

other nations. Russia has both intercontinental-range and short-range ballistic missiles and a varied nuclear weapons arsenal that can be delivered by sea, land, and air. It also is investing significant resources in modernizing its arsenal and maintaining the skills of its workforce, and nuclear triad modernization will remain a top priority under the new State Armaments Program.[57] However, an aging nuclear workforce could hamper modernization: "[A]lthough Russia's strategic-defence enterprises appear to have preserved some of their expertise, problems remain, for example, in transferring the necessary skill sets and experience to the younger generation of engineers."[58]

Russia is currently relying on its nuclear arsenal to ensure its invincibility against any enemy, intimidate European powers, and deter counters to its predatory behavior in its "near abroad," primarily in Ukraine but also concerning the Baltic States.[59] This arsenal serves as a protective umbrella under which Russia can modernize its conventional forces at a deliberate pace. While its nuclear deterrent protects it from a large-scale attack, Russia also needs a modern and flexible military to fight local wars such as those against Georgia in 2008 and the ongoing war against Ukraine that began in 2014. Under Russian military doctrine, the use of nuclear weapons in conventional local and regional wars is seen as de-escalatory because it would cause an enemy to concede defeat. In May 2017, for example, a Russian parliamentarian threatened that nuclear weapons might be used if the U.S. or NATO were to move to retake Crimea or defend eastern Ukraine.[60]

General Scaparrotti discussed the risks presented by Russia's possible use of tactical nuclear weapons in his March 23, 2017, EUCOM posture statement: "Most concerning...is Moscow's substantial inventory of non-strategic nuclear weapons in the EUCOM AOR [Area of Responsibility] and its troubling doctrine that calls on the potential use of these weapons to escalate its way out of a failing conflict."[61]

Particularly worrisome are Moscow's plans for rail-based nuclear-armed missiles, which are very difficult to detect. The missiles are scheduled to begin testing in 2019 and to become operational in 2020. Russia reportedly plans to deploy five regiments with a total of 30 railroad ICBMs: six missiles per regiment.[62] The Defense Ministry states that the new armed forces structure is being created with the goal of increased flexibility, mobility, and readiness for combat in limited-scale conflicts. Strategic Rocket Forces are the first line of defense (and offense) against Russia's great-power counterparts.[63]

Russia has two strategies for nuclear deterrence. The first is based on a threat of massive launch-on-warning and retaliatory strikes to deter a nuclear attack; the second is based on a threat of limited demonstration and "de-escalation" nuclear strikes to deter or terminate a large-scale conventional war.[64] Russia's reliance on nuclear weapons is based partly on their small cost relative to conventional weapons, especially in terms of their effect, and on Russia's inability to attract sufficient numbers of high-quality servicemembers. Thus, Russia sees its nuclear weapons as a way to offset the lower quantity and quality of its conventional forces.

Moscow has repeatedly threatened U.S. allies in Europe with nuclear deployments and even preemptive nuclear strikes.[65] The Russians justify their aggressive behavior by pointing to deployments of U.S. missile defense systems in Europe even though these systems are not scaled or postured to mitigate Russia's advantage in ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons to any significant degree.

Russia continues to violate the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which bans the testing, production, and possession of intermediate-range missiles.[66] In early 2017, Russia fully deployed the SSC-X-8 Cruise Missile in violation of the INF treaty. One battalion with the cruise missile remains at a missile test site in southern Russia, and another battalion with the missile deployed to an operational base in December 2016. U.S. officials acknowledge that the banned cruise missiles are no longer in the testing phase and now consider

them to be fully operational.[67] In March 2017, Joint Chiefs of Staff Vice Chairman and U.S. Air Force General Paul Selva testified that Russia's cruise missile deployment "violates the spirit and intent of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty" and "presents a risk to most of our facilities in Europe."[68] In December 2017, the U.S. announced new diplomatic, military, and economic measures "intended to induce the Russian Federation to return to compliance and to deny it any military advantage should it persist in its violation."[69]

Summary: The sizable Russian nuclear arsenal remains the only threat to the existence of the U.S. homeland emanating from Europe and Eurasia. While the potential for use of this arsenal remains low, the fact that Russia continues to threaten Europe with nuclear attack demonstrates that it will continue to play a central strategic role in shaping both Moscow's military and political thinking and its level of aggressive behavior beyond its borders.

Threat of Regional War

In the view of many U.S. allies, Russia poses a genuine threat. At times, this threat is of a military nature. At other times, Russia uses less conventional tactics such as cyberattacks, utilization of energy resources, and propaganda. Today as in Imperial times, Russia's influence is exerted by both the pen and the sword. Organizations like the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) or Eurasia Economic Union attempt to bind regional capitals to Moscow through a series of agreements and treaties.

Espionage is another tool that Russia uses in ways that are damaging to U.S. interests. In May 2016, a Russian spy was sentenced to prison for gathering intelligence for the Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) while working as a banker in New York. The spy specifically transmitted intelligence on "potential U.S. sanctions against Russian banks and the United States' efforts to develop alternative energy resources."[70] In May 2016, a senior intelligence official from Portugal working for the Portuguese Security Intelligence Service was arrested for passing secrets, especially classified NATO intelligence and material, to the Russian Federation.

On March 4, 2018, Sergei Skripal, a former Russian GRU colonel who was convicted in 2006 of selling secrets to the United Kingdom and freed in a spy swap between the U.S. and Russia in 2010,[71] and his daughter Yulia were poisoned with Novichok nerve agent by Russian security services in Salisbury, U.K. Hundreds of residents of Salisbury could have been contaminated,[72] including a police officer who was exposed to the nerve agent after responding.[73] The physical cleanup of Salisbury is ongoing as of this writing, and businesses in the city are struggling with mounting losses.[74] On March 15, France, Germany, the UK, and the U.S. issued a joint statement condemning Russia's use of the nerve agent: "This use of a military-grade nerve agent, of a type developed by Russia, constitutes the first offensive use of a nerve agent in Europe since the Second World War."[75]

In response to Russia's actions, two dozen countries expelled over 150 Russian intelligence agents operating under diplomatic cover; the U.S., for its part, expelled 60 Russian diplomats whom it had identified as intelligence agents and shuttered the Russian consulate in Seattle.[76] Russia retaliated by expelling 60 American diplomats and closing the U.S. consulate in St. Petersburg[77] in addition to expelling another 59 diplomats from 23 other nations.[78] In May, the suspected perpetrators of the poisoning were reported to be back in Russia.[79] Skripal, who survived the attack (along with his daughter), has continued to assist Western security services, including those of the Czech Republic and Estonia.[80] U.S. intelligence officials have reportedly linked Russia to the deaths of 14 people in the U.K. alone, many of them Russians who ran afoul of the Kremlin.[81]

Russian intelligence operatives are reportedly mapping U.S. telecommunications infrastructure around the United States, focusing especially on fiber optic cables.[82] In March 2017, the U.S. charged four people, including

two Russian intelligence officials, with directing hacks of user data involving Yahoo and Google accounts.[83] In December 2016, the U.S. expelled 35 Russian intelligence operatives, closed two compounds in Maryland and New York that were used for espionage, and levied additional economic sanctions against individuals who took part in interfering in the 2016 U.S. election.[84]

Russia has also used its relations with friendly nations—especially Nicaragua—for espionage purposes. In April 2017, Nicaragua began using a Russian-provided satellite station at Managua that—even though the Nicaraguan government denies it is intended for spying—is of concern to the U.S.[85] The Russian-built "counter-drug" center at Las Colinas that opened in November 2017 will likely be "supporting Russian security engagement with the entire region."[86] Russia also has an agreement with Nicaragua, signed in 2015, that allows access to Nicaraguan ports for its naval vessels.[87]

Russian Pressure on Central and Eastern Europe. Moscow poses a security challenge to members of NATO that border Russia. Although a conventional Russian attack against a NATO member is unlikely, primarily because it would trigger a NATO response, it cannot be entirely discounted. Russia continues to use nonconventional means to apply pressure to sow discord among NATO member states. Russia continues to utilize cyberattacks, espionage, its significant share of the European energy market, and propaganda to undermine the alliance. The Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service's *International Security and Estonia 2018* report states clearly that "[t]he only existential threat to the sovereignty of Estonia and other Baltic Sea states emanates from Russia. However, the threat of a direct Russian military attack on NATO member states in 2018 is low."[88]

Due to decades of Russian domination, the countries in Central and Eastern Europe factor Russia into their military planning and foreign policy formulation in a way that is simply unimaginable in many Western European countries and North America. Estonia and Latvia have sizable ethnic Russian populations, and there is concern that Russia might exploit the situation as a pretext for aggression. This view is not without merit, considering Moscow's irredentist rhetoric and Russia's use of this technique to annex Crimea.

The Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service report also predicted that Russian propaganda and fake think tanks would seek to "tarnish and diminish" events and celebrations surrounding the 100th anniversary of the Baltic States' independence.[89] In 2017, Lithuanian Defense Minister Raimundas Karoblis stated that Russian propaganda claims that the cities of Vilnius and Klaipeda did not belong to Lithuania may be groundwork for future "kinetic operations."[90] "There are real parallels with Crimea's annexation" by Russia, said Karoblis. "We are speaking of a danger to the territorial integrity of Lithuania."[91] Similar Russian efforts have sought to undermine the statehood and legitimacy of the other two Baltic States; in January 2018, for example, Putin signed a decree renaming an air force regiment the "Tallinn Regiment" to "preserve holy historical military traditions" and "raise [the] spirit of military obligation."[92]

General Scaparrotti testified in March 2017 that Russian propaganda and disinformation should be viewed as an extension of Russia's military capabilities: "The Russians see this as part of that spectrum of warfare, it's their asymmetric approach."[93] Russia has sought to use misinformation to undermine NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltics. In April 2017, Russian hackers planted a false story about U.S. troops being poisoned by mustard gas in Latvia on the Baltic News Service's website.[94] Similarly, Lithuanian parliamentarians and media outlets began to receive e-mails in February 2017 containing a false story that German soldiers had sexually assaulted an underage Lithuanian girl.[95] U.S. troops stationed in Poland for NATO's EFP have been the target of similar Russian misinformation campaigns.[96] A fake story that a U.S. Army vehicle had hit and killed a Lithuanian boy during Saber Strike 2018 in June was meant to undermine public support for NATO exercises.[97]

Russia has also demonstrated a willingness to use military force to change the borders of modern Europe. When Kremlin-backed Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych failed to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) in 2013, months of street demonstrations led to his ouster early in 2014. Russia responded by violating Ukraine's territorial integrity, sending troops, aided by pro-Russian local militia, to occupy the Crimean Peninsula under the pretext of "protecting Russian people." This led to Russia's eventual annexation of Crimea, the first such forcible annexation of territory in Europe since the Second World War.[98]

Russia's annexation of Crimea has effectively cut Ukraine's coastline in half, and Russia has claimed rights to underwater resources off the Crimean Peninsula.[99] In May 2018, Russia inaugurated the first portion of a $7.5 billion 11.8-mile bridge connecting Russia with Kerch in occupied Crimea. The project will be fully completed in 2023.[100] Russia has deployed 28,000 troops to Crimea and has embarked on a major program to build housing, restore airfields, and install new radars there.[101] In addition, control of Crimea has allowed Russia to use the Black Sea as a platform to launch and support naval operations in the Gulf of Aden and the Eastern Mediterranean.[102] Russia has allocated $1 billion to modernize the Black Sea fleet by 2020 and has stationed additional warships there, including two frigates equipped with Kaliber-NK long-range cruise missiles.[103] Kaliber cruise missiles have a range of at least 2,500km, placing cities from Rome to Vilnius within range of Black Sea–based cruise missiles.[104]

In August 2016, Russia deployed S-400 air defense systems with a potential range of around 250 miles to Crimea;[105] a second deployment occurred in January 2018.[106] In addition, "local capabilities have been strengthened by the Pantsir-S1 (SA-22 Greyhound) short-to-medium-range surface-to-air missile (SAM) and anti-aircraft artillery weapons system, which particularly complements the S-400."[107]

In eastern Ukraine, Russia has helped to foment and sustain a separatist movement. Backed, armed, and trained by Russia, separatist leaders in eastern Ukraine have declared the so-called Lugansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic. Russia has backed separatist factions in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine with advanced weapons, technical and financial assistance, and Russian conventional and special operations forces. Around 3,000 Russian soldiers are operating in Ukraine.[108] Russian-backed separatists daily violate the September 2014 and February 2015 cease-fire agreements, known respectively as Minsk I and Minsk II.[109] The Minsk cease-fire agreements have led to the de facto partition of Ukraine and have created a frozen conflict that remains both deadly and advantageous for Russia. The war in Ukraine has cost 11,000 lives and displaced 1.7 million people.[110]

In Moldova, Russia supports the breakaway enclave of Transnistria, where yet another frozen conflict festers to Moscow's liking. According to EUCOM's 2017 posture statement:

> Russia has employed a decades-long strategy of indirect action to coerce, destabilize, and otherwise exercise a malign influence over other nations. In neighboring states, Russia continues to fuel "protracted conflicts." In Moldova, for example, Russia has yet to follow through on its 1999 Istanbul summit commitments to withdraw an estimated 1,500 troops—whose presence has no mandate—from the Moldovan breakaway region of Transnistria. Russia asserts that it will remove its force once a comprehensive settlement to the Transnistrian conflict has been reached. However, Russia continued to undermine the discussion of a comprehensive settlement to the Transnistrian conflict at the 5+2 negotiations.[111]

Russia's permanent stationing of Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad in 2018 occurred a year to the day after NATO's EFP deployed to Lithuania.[112] Russia reportedly has deployed tactical

nuclear weapons, the S-400 air defense system, and P-800 anti-ship cruise missiles to Kaliningrad.[113] It also has outfitted a missile brigade in Luga, Russia, a mere 74 miles from the Estonian city of Narva, with Iskander missiles.[114] Iskanders have been deployed to the Southern Military District at Mozdok near Georgia and Krasnodar near Ukraine as well,[115] and Russian military officials have reportedly asked manufacturers to increase the Iskander missiles' range and improve their accuracy.[116]

Moreover, Russia is not deploying missiles only in Europe. In November 2016, Russia announced that it had stationed Bal and Bastion missile systems on the Kurile islands of Iturup and Kunashir, which are also claimed by Japan.[117] In February 2018, Russia approved the deployment of warplanes to an airport on Iturup, one of the largest islands.[118]

Russia has deployed additional troops and capabilities near its western borders. Bruno Kahl, head of the German Federal Intelligence Service, stated in March 2017 that "Russia has doubled its fighting power on its Western border, which cannot be considered as defensive against the West."[119] In January 2017, Russia's Ministry of Defence announced that four S-400 air defense systems would be deployed to the Western Military District.[120] In January 2016, Commander in Chief of Russian Ground Forces General Oleg Salyukov announced the formation of four new ground divisions, three of them based in the Western Military District, allegedly in response to "intensified exercises of NATO countries."[121] According to an assessment published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "The overall effect is to produce a line of substantial Russian combat forces along the western border, including opposite Belarus. By contrast with the ad hoc arrangements of the early stages of the conflict with Ukraine, these new forces are permanently established."[122]

Summary: Russia represents a real and potentially existential threat to NATO member countries in Eastern and Central Europe. Considering Russia's aggression in Georgia and Ukraine, a conventional attack against a NATO member by Russia, while unlikely, cannot be ruled out entirely. In all likelihood, Russia will continue to use nonlinear means in an effort to pressure and undermine both these nations and the NATO alliance.

Militarization of the High North. The Arctic region is home to some of the world's roughest terrain and harshest weather. Increasingly, the melting of Arctic ice during the summer months is causing new challenges for the U.S. in terms of Arctic security. Many of the shipping lanes currently used in the Arctic are a considerable distance from search and rescue (SAR) facilities, and natural resource exploration that would be considered routine in other locations is complex, costly, and dangerous in the Arctic.

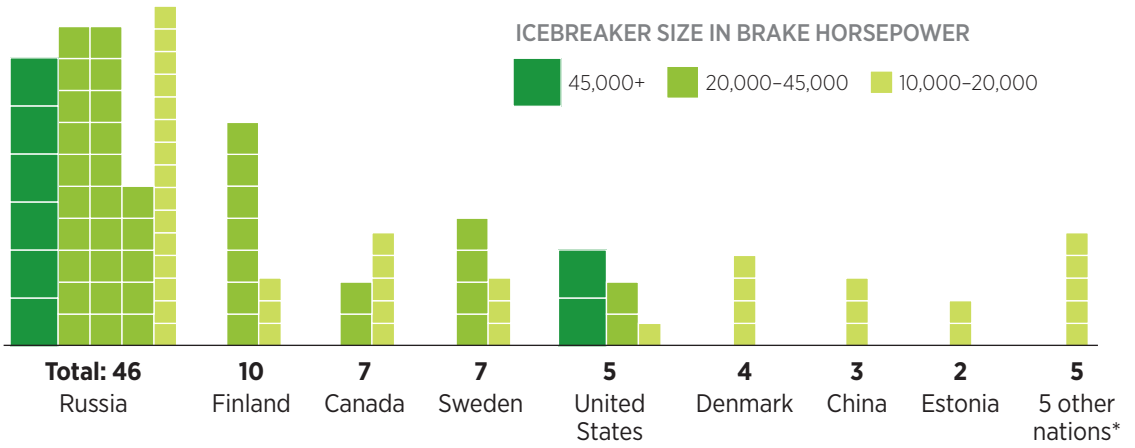
The U.S. is one of five littoral Arctic powers and one of only eight countries with territory located above the Arctic Circle, the area just north of 66 degrees north latitude that includes portions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Canada, Greenland, Iceland, and the United States.

Arctic actors take different approaches to military activity in the region. Although the security challenges currently faced in the Arctic are not yet military in nature, there is still a requirement for military capability in the region that can support civilian authorities. For example, civilian SAR and response to natural disasters in such an unforgiving environment can be augmented by the military.

Russia has taken steps to militarize its presence in the region. In March 2017, a decree signed by Russian President Putin gave the Federal Security Service (FSB) additional powers to confiscate land "in areas with special objects for land use, and in the border areas."[123] Russia's Arctic territory is included within this FSB-controlled border zone. The Arctic-based Northern Fleet accounts for two-thirds of the Russian Navy. A new Arctic command was established in 2015 to coordinate all Russian military activities in the Arctic region.[124] Two Arctic brigades have been formed, and Russia is planning to form Arctic Coastal Defense divisions,[125] which will be under the command of

CHART 7

Russia's Icebreaker Fleet Dominates the Arctic



* Norway, Germany, Latvia, Japan, and South Korea.

NOTE: List includes both government-owned and privately owned icebreakers. List excludes icebreakers for southern hemisphere countries Chile, Australia, South Africa, and Argentina.

SOURCE: Ronald O'Rourke, "Coast Guard Polar Icebreaker Program: Background and Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service *Report* RL34391, July 9, 2018, p. 10, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/weapons/RL34391.pdf (accessed August 1, 2018).

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the Northern Fleet and stationed in the Kola Peninsula and in Russia's eastern Arctic.[126]

Russia is also investing in Arctic bases. Its base on Alexandra Land, commissioned in 2017, can house 150 soldiers autonomously for up to 18 months.[127] In addition, old Soviet-era facilities have been reopened. The airfield on Kotelny Island, for example, was reactivated in 2013 for the first time in 20 years and "will be manned by 250 personnel and equipped with air defense missiles."[128] In 2018, Russia plans to open an Arctic airfield at Nagurskoye[129] that "will be equipped with a 2,500 meter long landing strip and a fleet of MiG-31 or Su-34" Russian fighters.[130]

In fact, air power in the Arctic is increasingly important to Russia, which has 14 operational airfields in the region along with 16 deep-water ports.[131] In January, the Northern Fleet announced that it would "significantly expand the geography of the Arctic flights."[132] These flights are often aggressive. In March 2017, nine Russian bombers simulated an attack on the U.S.-funded, Norwegian-run radar installation at Vardø, Norway, above the Arctic Circle.[133] In May 2017, 12 Russian aircraft simulated an attack against NATO naval forces taking part in the EASTLANT17 exercise near Tromsø, Norway, and later that month, Russian aircraft targeted aircraft from 12 nations, including the U.S., that took part in the Arctic Challenge 2017 exercise near Bodø.[134] In April 2018, Maritime Patrol Aircraft from Russia's Pacific Fleet for the first time exercised locating and bombing enemy submarines in the Arctic, while fighter jets exercised repelling an air invasion in the Arctic region.[135]

The 45th Air Force and Air Defense Army of the Northern Fleet was formed in December 2015, and Russia reportedly has placed radar and S-300 missiles on the Arctic bases at Franz Joseph Land, New Siberian Islands, Novaya Zemlya, and Severnaya Zemlya.[136] In 2017, Russia activated a new radar complex on Wrangel Island.[137] Beginning in 2019, Russia plans to lay a nearly 8,000-mile fiber optic

cable across its Arctic coast, linking military installations along the way from the Kola Peninsula through Vladivostok.[138]

Russia's ultimate goal is to have a combined Russian armed force deployed in the Arctic by 2020,[139] and it appears that Moscow is on track to accomplish this. Russia is developing equipment optimized for Arctic conditions like the Mi-38 helicopter[140] and three new nuclear icebreakers to add to the 40 icebreakers already in service (six of which are nuclear).[141] Admiral Paul F. Zukunft, former Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard, has expressed concern that "Russia probably is going to launch two icebreaking corvettes with cruise missiles on them over the course of the next several years."[142]

In July 2017, Russia released a new naval doctrine that cited an alleged threat from the "ambition of a range of states, and foremost the United States of America and its allies, to dominate the high seas, including in the Arctic, and to press for overwhelming superiority of their naval forces."[143] In May 2017, Russia announced that its buildup of the Northern Fleet's nuclear capacity is intended "to phase 'NATO out of [the] Arctic.'"[144]

Russia's Northern Fleet is also building newly refitted submarines, including a newly converted Belgorod nuclear-powered submarine that will be commissioned in 2018 or 2019 to carry out "special missions."[145] Construction on the vessel had been suspended in 2000 when the *Kursk*, its sister submarine, sank. According to Russian media reports, the submarine "will be engaged in studying the bottom of the Russian Arctic shelf, searching for minerals at great depths, and also laying underwater communications."[146] In January 2018, Russia established a deep-water division, based in Gadzhiyevo in the Murmansk region, that is directly subordinate to the Minister of Defense.[147]

Summary: Russia continues to develop and increase its military capabilities in the Arctic region. The likelihood of armed conflict remains low, but physical changes in the region mean that the posture of players in the Arctic will continue to evolve. It is clear that Russia intends to exert a dominant influence. In the words of EUCOM's 2018 posture statement:

> In the Arctic, Russia is revitalizing its northern fleet and building or renovating military bases along their Arctic coast line in anticipation of increased military and commercial activity.... Although the chances of military conflict in the Arctic are low in the near-term, Russia is increasing its qualitative advantage in Arctic operations, and its military bases will serve to reinforce Russia's position with the threat of force.[148]

Russian Destabilization in the South Caucasus. The South Caucasus sits at a crucial geographical and cultural crossroads and has proven to be strategically important, both militarily and economically, for centuries. Although the countries in the region (Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan) are not part of NATO and therefore do not receive a security guarantee from the United States, they have participated to varying degrees in NATO and U.S.-led operations. This is especially true of Georgia, which aspires to join NATO.

Russia views the South Caucasus as part of its natural sphere of influence and stands ready to exert its influence in the region by force if necessary. In August 2008, Russia invaded Georgia, coming as close as 15 miles to the capital city of Tbilisi. Seven years later, several thousand Russian troops occupied the two Georgian provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

In 2015, Russia signed so-called integration treaties with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Among other things, these treaties call for a coordinated foreign policy, creation of a common security and defense space, and implementation of a streamlined process for Abkhazians and South Ossetians to receive Russian citizenship.[149] The Georgian Foreign Ministry criticized the treaties as a step toward "annexation of Georgia's occupied territories,"[150] both of which are still internationally recognized as part of Georgia. In January 2018,

Russia ratified an agreement with the de facto leaders of South Ossetia to create a joint military force, which the U.S. condemned.[151]

In November 2017, the U.S. State Department approved an estimated $75 million sale of Javelin missiles to Georgia.[152] Russia has based 7,000 soldiers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia[153] and is regularly expanding its "creeping annexation" of Georgia.[154] Towns are split in two and families are separated as a result of Russia's occupation and imposition of an internal border. In 2017 alone, over 514 people were detained by Russian border guards for "illegal" crossings into South Ossetia.[155]

Today, Moscow continues to exploit ethnic divisions and tensions in the South Caucasus to advance pro-Russian policies that are often at odds with America's or NATO's goals in the region, but Russia's influence is not restricted to soft power. In the South Caucasus, the coin of the realm is military might. It is a rough neighborhood surrounded by instability and insecurity reflected in terrorism, religious fanaticism, centuries-old sectarian divides, and competition for natural resources.

Russia maintains a sizable military presence in Armenia based on an agreement giving Moscow access to bases in that country for 49 years.[156] The bulk of Russia's forces, consisting of 3,300 soldiers, dozens of fighter planes and attack helicopters, 74 T-72 tanks, and S-300 and Buk M01 air defense systems, are based around the 102nd Military Base.[157] In 2015, Russia and Armenia signed a Combined Regional Air Defense System agreement. In March 2018, Russia signed a new $100 million defense loan with Armenia.[158] Around the same time, nationwide protests arose in Armenia that led to the election of a new prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan.[159] Once elected, Pashinyan met with Russian President Putin and declared that he "favored closer political and military ties with Russia."[160]

Another source of regional instability is the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict, which began in 1988 when Armenia made territorial claims to Azerbaijan's Nagorno–Karabakh Autonomous Oblast.[161] By 1992, Armenian forces and Armenian-backed militias had occupied 20 percent of Azerbaijan, including the Nagorno–Karabakh region and seven surrounding districts. A cease-fire agreement was signed in 1994, and the conflict has been described as frozen since then. Since August 2014, violence has increased noticeably along the Line of Contact between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces. Intense fighting in April 2016 left 200 dead.[162] In addition, Azerbaijani forces recaptured some of the territory lost to Armenia in the early 1990s, the first changes in the Line of Contact since 1994.[163] Recently, tensions have escalated, with the Azerbaijani army declaring its full preparation for large-scale military operations against Armenia.[164]

This conflict offers another opportunity for Russia to exert malign influence and consolidate power in the region. While its sympathies lie with Armenia, Russia is the largest supplier of weapons to both Armenia and Azerbaijan.[165] As noted by the late Dr. Alexandros Petersen, a highly respected expert on Eurasian security, it is no secret "that the Nagorno–Karabakh dispute is a Russian proxy conflict, maintained in simmering stasis by Russian arms sales to both sides so that Moscow can sustain leverage over Armenia, Azerbaijan and by its geographic proximity Georgia."[166]

Following the outbreak of fighting, Russia expanded its influence in the region by brokering a shaky cease-fire that has largely held. By the time the OSCE Minsk Group, created in 1995 to find a peaceful solution to the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict, met, the Russian-brokered cease-fire was already in place.[167]

The South Caucasus might seem distant to many American policymakers, but the spillover effect of ongoing conflict in the region can have a direct impact both on U.S. interests and on the security of America's partners, as well as on Turkey and other countries that are dependent on oil and gas transiting the region.

Summary: Russia views the South Caucasus as a vital theater and uses a multitude of tools that include military aggression, economic pressure, and the stoking of ethnic tensions to exert influence and control, usually

MAP 4

The Ganja Gap

To bypass Russia or Iran for overland trade between Asia and Europe there is only one option: Azerbaijan. Armenia's occupation of almost 20 percent of Azerbaijan's territory means that there is only a narrow 60-mile-wide chokepoint for trade. This is the Ganja Gap.

NOTE: Pipeline locations are approximate.
SOURCE: Heritage Foundation research.

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to promote outcomes that are at odds with U.S. interests.

Increasingly Active Mediterranean. Although Russia has had a military presence in Syria for decades, in September 2015, it became the decisive actor in Syria's ongoing civil war, having saved Bashar al-Assad from being overthrown and strengthened his hand militarily, thus enabling government forces to retake territory lost during the war. In January 2017, Russia signed an agreement with the Assad regime to expand the naval facility at Tartus (Russia's only naval base on the Mediterranean) "under a 49-year lease that could automatically renew for a further 25 years." The planned expansion reportedly would "provide simultaneous berthing for up to 11 warships, including nuclear-powered vessels, more than doubling [the facility's] present known capacity."[168] Russia is expanding the Tartus base to include a submarine maintenance facility.[169]

The agreement with Syria also includes upgrades to the Hmeymim air base at Latakia, including repairs to a second runway.[170] Russia deployed the S-400 anti-aircraft missile system to Hmeymim in late 2015.[171] In addition to the S-400 system, Russia has deployed the Pantsir S1 system. "The two systems working in tandem provide a 'layered defense,'" according to one account, "with the S-400 providing long-ranged protection against bombers, fighter jets, and ballistic missiles, and the Pantsir providing medium-ranged protection against cruise missiles, low-flying strike aircraft, and drones."[172]

Russia is using Syria as a testing ground for new weapons systems while obtaining valuable combat experience for its troops. According to Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, former Commander, U.S. Army Europe, Russia has used its intervention in Syria as a "live-fire training opportunity."[173] In February 2017, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu claimed that Russia had tested 162 weapons systems in Syria.[174] Despite this display of Russian arms in Syria, however, Russian weapons exports have remained flat, in part because India and China are developing more weapons systems domestically.[175] In 2016, Russian arms exports rose slightly to $15 billion, up from $14.5 billion in 2015 but still lower than $15.7 billion in 2013.[176]

Russia's activities in Syria have allowed Assad to stay in power and have made achievement of a peaceful political settlement with rebel groups nearly impossible. They also have undermined American policy in the Middle East, including by frequently targeting U.S.-backed forces. A study of Russian airstrikes in Syria from September 2015 to March 2018 found that only 14 percent targeted ISIS and that Russian airstrikes were "particularly concentrated in areas where the Islamic State had little or no operational presence."[177]

Russian pilots have occasionally acted dangerously in the skies over Syria. In May 2017, for example, a Russian fighter jet intercepted a U.S. KC-10 tanker, performing a barrel roll over the top of the KC-10.[178] That same month, Russia stated that U.S. and allied aircraft would be banned from flying over large areas of Syria because of a deal agreed to by Russia, Iran, and Turkey. The U.S. responded that the deal does not "preclude anyone from going after terrorists wherever they may be in Syria."[179] The U.S. and Russia have a deconfliction hotline to avoid mid-air collisions and incidents.

In November 2018, Russia sought to solidify its relations with Egypt, approving a five-year agreement for the two countries to use each other's air bases.[180] Russia has also greatly stepped up its military operations in the Mediterranean, often harassing U.S. and allied vessels taking part in counter-IS operations. In April 2018, for example, a fully armed Russian Su-24M Fencer and Su-30SM Flanker fighter aircraft flew aggressively low over the *Aquitaine*, a French frigate operating in the eastern Mediterranean.[181] That same month, one or two improved *Kilo*-class submarines, two Russian frigates, and Russian anti-submarine aircraft pursued a British *Astute*-class attack submarine operating in the Mediterranean near Syria. The British sub received assistance from U.S. P-8As operating in the region.[182]

In addition, the U.S., along with British, Dutch, and Spanish allies, tracked the *Krasnodar*, a *Kilo*-class submarine, as it sailed from the Baltic Sea to a Russian base in occupied Crimea from April–August 2017. The submarine stopped twice in the eastern Mediterranean to launch cruise missiles into Syria and conducted drills in the Baltic Sea and off the coast of Libya. It was one of the first times since the Cold War that the U.S. and NATO allies had tracked a Russian submarine during combat operations.[183]

Summary: Russia's entrenched position in Syria, including its expanded area-access/area-denial capabilities and increased submarine presence, underscores the growing importance of the Mediterranean theater in ensuring Europe's security.

The Balkans. Security has improved dramatically in the Balkans since the 1990s, but violence based on religious and ethnic differences remains an ongoing possibility. These tensions are exacerbated by sluggish economies, high unemployment, and political corruption.

Russia's interests in the Western Balkans are at odds with the desire of the U.S. and our European allies to continue to assist the region in forging closer ties to the transatlantic community. Russia seeks to sever the transatlantic bond forged with the Western Balkans by sowing instability, chiefly by inflaming preexisting ethnic, historic, and religious tensions. Russian propaganda magnifies this toxic ethnic and religious messaging, fans public disillusionment with the West as well as institutions inside the Balkan nations, and misinforms the public about Russia's intentions and interests in the region.[184]

Senior members of the Russian government have cited NATO enlargement in the Balkans as one of the biggest threats to Russia.[185] In June 2017, Montenegro became NATO's 29th member state, joining Albania and Croatia as NATO member states in the Balkans. Russia stands accused of being behind a failed plot to break into Montenegro's parliament on election day in 2016, assassinate its former prime minister, and install a pro-Russian government. The trial of 14 people accused of taking part in the coup plot began in July 2017. Two Russian nationals believed to be the masterminds behind the plot are being tried in absentia.[186]

After Russia annexed Crimea, the Montenegrin government backed European sanctions against Moscow and even implemented its own sanctions. Nevertheless, Russia has significant economic influence in Montenegro and in 2015 sought unsuccessfully to gain access to Montenegrin ports for the Russian navy to refuel and perform maintenance. Today, Russia accounts for one-third of foreign direct investment in Montenegro, and Russian nationals or companies own 40 percent of the nation's real estate as well as almost one-third of all Montenegrin companies.[187]

Serbia in particular has long served as Russia's foothold in the Balkans:

> Russia's influence in the Balkans centers on Serbia, a fellow religiously orthodox nation with whom it enjoys a close economic, political, and military relationship. Serbia and Russia have an agreement in place allowing Russian soldiers to be based at Niš airport in Serbia. The two countries signed a 15-year military cooperation agreement in 2013 that includes sharing of intelligence, officer exchanges, and joint military exercises. In October, Russia gave Serbia six MiG-29 fighters (which while free, will require Serbia to spend $235 million to have them overhauled). Additionally, Russia plans to supply Serbia with helicopters, T-72 tanks, armored vehicles, and potentially even surface-to-air missile systems.[188]

The so-called Russian–Serbian Humanitarian Center at Niš—widely believed to be a Russian spy base—is only 58 miles from NATO's Kosovo Force mission based in Pristina.[189]

Serbia and Russia have signed a strategic partnership agreement focused on economic issues. Russia's inward investment is focused on the transport and energy sectors. Except for

those in the Commonwealth of Independent States, Serbia is the only country in Europe that has a free trade deal with Russia. Russia dealt a blow to Serbia in 2014 when it cancelled plans to build the South Stream Pipeline. The pipeline's proposed route through the Western Balkans would have been lucrative to Serbia and would have greatly strengthened Russia's energy grip on the region.

However, Serbia still exercises far more without Russia than with Russia: "In 2016, out of 26 training exercises only two are with Russia. Out of 21 multinational training drills in 2015, the Serbian military participated in only two with Russia."[190] Like Russia, Serbia is a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace program. Additionally, Serbia has been part of the U.S. National Guard's State Partnership Program, partnering with the State of Ohio since 2006.

Russia is also active in Bosnia and Herzegovina—specifically, the ethnically Serb Republika Srpska, one of two substate entities inside Bosnia and Herzegovina that emerged from that country's civil war in the 1990s. Moscow knows that the easiest way to prevent Bosnia and Herzegovina from entering the transatlantic community is by exploiting internal ethnic and religious divisions among the country's Bosniak, Croat, and Serb populations.

Republika Srpska's leader, Milorad Dodik, has long advocated independence for the region and has enjoyed a very close relationship with the Kremlin. Recent events in Ukraine, especially the annexation of Crimea, have inspired more separatist rhetoric in Republika Srpska.

In many ways, Russia's relationship with Republika Srpska is akin to its relationship with Georgia's South Ossetia and Abkhazia autonomous regions: more like a relationship with another sovereign state than a relationship with a semiautonomous region inside Bosnia and Herzegovina. When Putin visited Serbia in October 2014, Dodik was treated like a head of state and invited to Belgrade to meet with him. More recently, in September 2016, Dodik was treated as a head of state on a visit to Moscow just days before a referendum that chose January 9 as Republika Srpska's "statehood day," a date filled with religious and ethnic symbolism for the Serbs.[191] Republika Srpska hosted its "statehood day" in defiance of a ruling by Bosnia's federal constitutional court that both the celebration and the referendum establishing it were illegal.[192] The U.S. sanctioned Dodik in January 2017, saying that "by obstructing the Dayton accords, Milorad Dodik poses a significant threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia–Herzegovina."[193]

On January 9, 2018, Bosnian Serbs again held "statehood day."[194] Joining in this year's celebrations was a delegation from the breakaway region of South Ossetia in Georgia.[195] Dodik and the self-proclaimed leaders of South Ossetia "signed a memorandum on cooperation between the 'states.'"[196] Russia has reportedly trained a Republika Srpska paramilitary force in Russia at the nearby Niš airbase to defend the Serbian entity. It has been reported that "[s]ome of its members fought as mercenaries alongside the Kremlin's proxy separatists in Ukraine."[197]

Russia does not want to see Kosovo as a successful nation pointed toward the West. Rather, it seeks to derail Kosovo's efforts to integrate into the West, often utilizing grievances of the Serbian minority to cause problems. In the most jarring example, in January 2017, a train traveling from Belgrade to Mitrovica, a heavily Serb town in Kosovo, was stopped at the Kosovar border. The Russian-made train was "painted in the colors of the Serbian flag and featured pictures of churches, monasteries, and medieval towns, as well as the words 'Kosovo is Serbian' in 21 languages."[198]

Macedonia's accession to NATO remains on hold because of opposition by Greece. In January 2018, Greece and Macedonia agreed to renew talks to find a settlement of the name dispute, and the talks are ongoing. The decade-long denial of Macedonia's admission to NATO is having a deleterious impact on the public's perception of the alliance. While support for membership remains high, public support is beginning to decline.[199]

Russia's destabilizing influence may be partly to blame for this decline. Leaked reports of a memo prepared for the Director of Macedonia's Administration for Security and Counterintelligence detail Russia's decades-long efforts to destabilize Macedonia through espionage and propaganda. According to one excerpt, "it is evaluated that in the past nine years, the Republic of Macedonia has been undergoing strong subversive propaganda and intelligence activity implemented through the Embassy of the RF (Russian Federation)."[200] Russia has also sought to gain influence in Macedonia by constructing Orthodox churches and creating so-called friendship associations.[201]

In addition to Russia's destabilizing influence, the region faces threats from Islamist terrorism, rising Chinese investment and influence, and the potentially negative impacts of Turkish economic, cultural, and religious ties. The U.S. has invested heavily in the Balkans since the end of the Cold War. Tens of thousands of U.S. servicemembers have served in the Balkans, and the U.S. has spent billions of dollars in aid there, all in the hope of creating a secure and prosperous region that will someday be part of the transatlantic community.

Summary: The foremost external threat to the Balkans is Russia. Russia's interests in the Balkans are at odds with the U.S. goal of encouraging the region to progress toward the transatlantic community. Russia seeks to sever the transatlantic bond forged with the Western Balkans by sowing instability and increasing its economic, political, and military footprint in the region.

Threats to the Commons

Other than cyberspace and (to some extent) airspace, the commons are relatively secure in the European region. Despite periodic Russian aggressive maneuvers near U.S. and NATO vessels, this remains largely true with respect to the security of and free passage through shipping lanes: The maritime domain is heavily patrolled by the navies and coast guards of NATO and NATO partner countries; except in remote areas in the Arctic Sea, search and rescue capabilities are readily available; maritime-launched terrorism is not a significant problem; and piracy is virtually nonexistent.

Sea. On February 10, 2017, the USS *Porter*, a destroyer operating in international waters in the Black Sea, was buzzed by two Russian Su-24 fighters, followed by a solo Su-24 and finally by a Russian IL-38. The aircraft were flying with their transponders switched off and did not respond to radio requests to stop. A spokesperson for EUCOM said that such buzzing incidents are "always concerning because they could result in miscalculation or accident."[202] In April 2018, a fully armed Russian jet buzzed a French frigate operating in the eastern Mediterranean.[203]

Russian threats to the maritime theater also include activity near undersea fiber optic cables. In December 2017, Rear Admiral Andrew Lennon, Commander Submarines NATO, stated, "We are now seeing Russian underwater activity in the vicinity of undersea cables that I don't believe we have ever seen."[204] On any given day, undersea cables "carry some $10 trillion of financial transfers and process some 15 million financial transactions," to say nothing of the breadth of nonfinancial information and communications that they carry.[205] The *Yantar*, a mother ship to two Russian mini submersibles,[206] is often seen near undersea cables, which it is capable of tapping or cutting, and has been observed collecting intelligence near U.S. naval facilities, including the submarine base at Kings Bay, Georgia.[207] The Russian spy ship *Viktor Leonov* was spotted collecting intelligence within 20 miles of Kings Bay in March 2017 and within 30 miles of Groton, Connecticut, in February 2018.[208]

Airspace. Russia has continued its provocative military flights near U.S. and European airspace over the past year. In January 2018, a Russian Su-27 fighter intercepted a U.S. surveillance aircraft operating over the Black Sea, forcing the surveillance aircraft to return to base. "This interaction was determined to be unsafe," according to a statement from the U.S. 6th Fleet, "due to the SU-27 closing to within

five feet and crossing directly through the EP-3's flight path, causing the EP-3 to fly through the SU-27's jet wash."[209] In November 2017, a Russian Su-30 fighter flew within 50 feet of a U.S. P-8A flying over the Black Sea in a 24-minute intercept that the U.S. also called "unsafe." Specifically, "the aircraft crossed in front of the US plane from right to left while engaging its afterburners, forcing the P-8 to enter its jet wash, an action that caused the US plane to experience 'a 15-degree roll and violent turbulence,'" according to a Pentagon spokeswoman[210] In another incident in January 2018, Belgian and British fighters scrambled to intercept two Russian TU-160 Blackjack bombers flying in NATO airspace over the North Sea.[211]

Aggressive Russian flying has also occurred near U.S. airspace. In May 2018, U.S. F-22s intercepted two Tu-95 Bear Bombers, which flew into the American Air Defense Identification Zone near Alaska.[212]

Russian flights have also targeted U.S. ally Japan. In April 2017, three Russian Tu-95 Bear Bombers and an IL-20 surveillance aircraft flew within 36 miles of the Japanese coast, and 14 Japanese fighters were scrambled to intercept them.[213] A similar incident occurred in January 2017 when three Russian Bear bombers, three refueling IL-78 aircraft, and two radar and communications A-50 AWACS flew near Japan. The bombers flew around Japan, and the incident caused NORAD to increase its threat posture from 5 to 4.[214] In November, two Tu-95 bombers flew within 80 miles of the USS *Ronald Reagan* aircraft carrier operating in the Sea of Japan before being escorted away by American F-18 fighters.[215]

The main threat from Russian airspace incursions, however, remains near NATO territory in Eastern Europe, specifically the Black Sea and Baltic regions. In April 2018, NATO jets taking part in Baltic Air Policing intercepted two Russian Su-35 fighters and one Su-24 attack aircraft that were flying over the Baltic Sea. "The Russian aircraft had their onboard transponders off, kept no radio contact with the regional air traffic control center, and hadn't submitted a flight plan."[216] In the Baltics, NATO aircraft intercepted Russian military aircraft 120 times in 2017, an increase over the 110 intercepts recorded in 2016 but still less than the 2015 high of 160.[217]

That the provocative and hazardous behavior of the Russian armed forces or Russian-sponsored groups poses a threat to civilian aircraft in Europe was demonstrated by the July 2014 downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, killing all 283 passengers and 15 crewmembers, over the skies of southeastern Ukraine. In addition, there have been several incidents involving Russian military aircraft flying in Europe without using their transponders. In February 2015, for example, civilian aircraft in Ireland had to be diverted or were prevented from taking off when Russian bombers flying with their transponders turned off flew across civilian air lanes.[218] Similarly, in March 2014, Scandinavian Airlines plane almost collided with a Russian signals intelligence (SIGINT) plane, the two coming within 90 meters of each other.[219] In a December 2014 incident, a Cimber Airlines flight from Copenhagen to Poznan nearly collided with a Russian intelligence plane that was flying with its transponder turned off.[220]

Summary: Russia's violation of the sovereign airspace of NATO member states is a probing and antagonistic policy that is designed both to test the defense of the alliance and as practice for potential future conflicts. Similarly, Russian antagonistic behavior in international waters is a threat to freedom of the seas. Russia's reckless aerial activity in the region remains a threat to civilian aircraft flying in European airspace.

Cyber. Russian cyber capabilities are sophisticated and active, regularly threatening economic, social, and political targets around the world. Even more, Moscow appears to be increasingly aggressive in its use of digital techniques, often employing only the slightest veneer of deniability in an effort to intimidate targets and openly defy international norms and organizations. Russia clearly believes that these online operations will be essential to its domestic and foreign policy for the foreseeable

future. As former Chief of the Russian General Staff General Yuri Baluyevsky, has observed, "[cyber-attacks are] much more important than victory in a classical military conflict, because it is bloodless, yet the impact is overwhelming and can paralyze all of the enemy state's power structures."[221]

Relatedly, the 2018 Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community (WWTA) identifies the cyber threat as one of our nation's top concerns and cites Russia specifically:

> We expect that Russia will conduct bolder and more disruptive cyber operations during the next year, most likely using new capabilities against Ukraine. The Russian Government is likely to build on the wide range of operations it is already conducting, including disruption of Ukrainian energy distribution networks, hack-and-leak influence operations, distributed denial-of-service attacks, and false flag operations. In the next year, Russian intelligence and security services will continue to probe US and allied critical infrastructures, as well as target the United States, NATO, and allies for insights into US policy.[222]

In June 2018, the U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned five Russian entities and three Russian individuals for "malign and destabilizing" cyber activities, including "the destructive NotPetya cyber-attack; cyber intrusions against the U.S. energy grid to potentially enable future offensive operations; and global compromises of network infrastructure devices, including routers and switches, also to potentially enable disruptive cyber-attacks."[223] These sanctions built on a joint assessment by the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI that Russian hackers were behind a series of attacks against American network infrastructure devices and the U.S. energy and critical infrastructure sectors.[224]

But the United States is not Russia's only target. In April 2018 alone, Germany's head of domestic intelligence accused Moscow of attacking his government's computer networks, and the U.K.'s National Cyber Security Center warned that Russian hackers were targeting Britain's critical infrastructure supply chains. Russia continues to employ cyber as a key tool in manipulating and undermining democratic elections in Europe and elsewhere.

In addition to official intelligence and military cyber assets, Russia continues to employ allied criminal organizations (so-called patriotic hackers) to help it engage in cyber aggression. Using these hackers gives Russia greater resources and can help to shield their true capabilities. Patriotic hackers also give the Russian government deniability when it is desired. In June 2017, for example, Putin stated that "[i]f they (hackers) are patriotically-minded, they start to make their own contribution to what they believe is the good fight against those who speak badly about Russia. Is that possible? Theoretically it is possible."[225]

Summary: Russia's cyber capabilities are advanced and are a key tool in realizing the state's strategic aims. Russia has used cyber-attacks to further the reach and effectiveness of its propaganda and disinformation campaigns, and its ongoing cyber-attacks against election processes in the U.S. and European countries are designed to undermine citizens' belief in the veracity of electoral outcomes and erode support for democratic institutions in the longer term. Russia also has used cyber-attacks to target physical infrastructure, including electrical grids, air traffic control, and gas distribution systems. Russia's increasingly bold use of cyber capabilities, coupled with their sophistication and Moscow's willingness to use them aggressively, presents a challenge to the U.S. and its interests abroad.

Conclusion

Overall, the threat to the U.S. homeland originating from Europe remains low, but the threat to America's interests and allies in the region remains significant. Behind this threat lies Russia. Although Russia has the military capability to harm and (in the case of its

nuclear arsenal) to pose an existential threat to the U.S., it has not conclusively demonstrated the intent to do so.

The situation is different when it comes to America's allies in the region. Through NATO, the U.S. is obliged by treaty to come to the aid of the alliance's European members. Russia continues its efforts to undermine the NATO alliance and presents an existential threat to U.S. allies in Eastern Europe. NATO has been the cornerstone of European security and stability ever since its creation in 1949, and it is in America's interest to ensure that it maintains both the military capability and the political will to fulfill its treaty obligations.

While Russia is not the threat to U.S. global interests that the Soviet Union was during the Cold War, it does pose challenges to a range of America's interests and those of its allies and friends closest to Russia's borders. Russia possesses a full range of capabilities from ground forces to air, naval, space, and cyber. It still maintains the world's largest nuclear arsenal, and although a strike on the U.S. is highly unlikely, the latent potential for such a strike still gives these weapons enough strategic value vis-à-vis America's NATO allies and interests in Europe to keep them relevant.

Russian provocations much less serious than any scenario involving a nuclear exchange pose the most serious challenge to American interests, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, the Arctic, the Balkans, and the South Caucasus. The 2018 WWTA states that "Moscow will use a range of relatively low-cost tools to advance its foreign policy objectives, including influence campaigns, economic coercion, cyber operations, multilateral forums, and measured military force."[226] For these reasons, this *Index* continues to assess the threat from Russia as "aggressive" and "formidable."

Threats: Russia

	HOSTILE	AGGRESSIVE	TESTING	ASSERTIVE	BENIGN
Behavior		✓			

	FORMIDABLE	GATHERING	CAPABLE	ASPIRATIONAL	MARGINAL
Capability	✓				

Endnotes

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