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Pro Evidence

Europe stability

Continued investment in the Baltics is key to eastern Europe's stability

Painter 2020 (Sally Painter, September 8 2020, Atlantic Council, "US must remain committed to NATO and the Baltic States" <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/us-must-remain-committed-to-nato-and-the-baltic-states/>)

The three Baltic countries of Northern Europe have long been allies of the United States and valued members of the NATO community. In the 20th century, the United States refused to recognize the Soviet Union's claim on Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia and supported the restoration of their independence in 1991. Our Baltic friends never forgot this important solidarity, and since then have promoted democracy and stability in their corner of Europe and worked diligently to attain membership in NATO and the EU community through systemic reforms to their economy, governance, and security. Rightfully so, the Baltics saw their integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions as an important deterrent to Russian influence, which continues to loom as a regional threat to their sovereignty and national security. These threats have only escalated since Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. In this context, it is vital that the United States firmly recommit to NATO and increase its support of the Baltic countries to ensure the continuation of strong bilateral relations and the effective partnerships that have strengthened the entire transatlantic community. Membership in NATO, a long-time aspiration for the Baltics, required that they undergo robust changes, and the subsequent reform process served as a key element for strengthening bilateral relations with the United States and a foundational pillar of transatlantic security. Since their accession in 2004, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia have been responsible members of, and active contributors to, the NATO alliance. Despite the size of their national military forces, each country has actively supported regional security in Europe and participated in global NATO activities, including contributing troops to missions in Afghanistan. By 2019, all three countries increased their defense spending to the recommended two percent of their overall national budgets. This upwards trajectory has resulted in vital support from the international community. At the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw, Poland, NATO reaffirmed its support for the Baltics by introducing Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) units to all three Baltic states as well as Poland. NATO also now provides fighter aircraft to the Baltics, which have been increased following the 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Unfortunately, the non-permanent nature of these programs is not sufficient to guarantee the full military capabilities of the Baltics nor to bring peace of mind to its citizens. Given increased Russian presence in the region, each country must rely heavily on the collective defense agreement of the North Atlantic Treaty if it hopes to stand a chance against foreign interference. The United States together with its European partners and the international community must do more to prevent such foreign interference and ensure that the Baltic states are fully equipped with the tools and support structures that underpin their security. To date, the United States has demonstrated its support for the Baltic region through the US-Baltic Charter, an alliance of values among the countries signed in 1998. The signatories agreed to a shared vision "of a peaceful and increasingly integrated Europe, free of divisions, dedicated to democracy, the rule of law, free markets, and respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people." The Charter's emphasis on the vitality of independence and territorial integrity established grounds for a prosperous

partnership and paved the way for Baltic integration into NATO. It provides an established path to follow for re-engaging with our allies and strengthening this vital transatlantic partnership. Perhaps even more so than in any recent year, this mission remains relevant and timely. Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia have strongly demonstrated their dedication to the transatlantic alliance and have worked diligently to implement systematic reforms on a variety of shared concerns ranging from energy security, transparency, and economic vitality.

NATO must address the problems of stability that exist within Europe

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, "RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION," <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

The COVID-19 pandemic is among the greatest threats the world has faced since the Second World War. The virus – which some have termed a “global strategic shock” – has affected almost the entire globe, including all NATO nations. The disease has had a profound impact on the populations and economies of member states, while also posing unprecedented challenges to the security and stability of the transatlantic community, with possible long-term consequences. Armed forces in countries across the NATO alliance have been playing a key role in supporting national civilian efforts responding to the pandemic. NATO has helped with planning, logistics, and coordinating support. NATO aircraft have flown hundreds of missions to transport medical personnel, supplies, personal protection equipment, treatment technology, and field hospitals. It is still too early to draw comprehensive conclusions about the implications of the pandemic. But COVID-19 has revealed the vulnerability of our societies, institutions, and international relations. It may come to affect our general understanding of security, leading to increased importance for human security over national security. Ideas of “resilience” have hitherto usually applied to cyber defense, energy security, communications, measures against disinformation and propaganda, and other hybrid tactics. But in future the concept may also include civil and military preparedness, above all precautionary measures taken ahead of possible pandemics. So the pandemic will likely also have medium- and long-term implications for NATO. The alliance is already working to develop pandemic response contingency plans, envisaging NATO forces contributing to civil emergency management. But the current focus on the pandemic and managing its political and economic consequences does not mean that existing strategic challenges for the transatlantic community have disappeared, or that they are diminishing. On the contrary, the pandemic has the potential to aggravate existing challenges. Potential adversaries will look to exploit the situation to further their own interests. Terrorist groups could be emboldened. Russia and China have already attempted to pursue geopolitical objectives by “a politics of generosity,” driving a wedge between NATO members and other EU member states. We cannot rule out that the Russian leadership – facing a triple crisis, combining low oil prices, a stalled constitutional process, and socio-economic hardships – might again look to foreign policy adventurism to create a new “rally around the flag” effect. This means NATO must maintain its unique role and capabilities. Its core mission remains the same: ensuring peace and stability for the Euro-Atlantic region. It is by now a commonplace that Europe’s security environment underwent fundamental change in 2014. To the east, Russia’s aggressive actions against Ukraine and its illegal annexation of Crimea profoundly altered the conditions for security in Europe. To the south, the “Arc of Instability” stretching across North Africa and the

Middle East has fueled terrorism and triggered mass migration, in turn affecting the stability of Europe. At the same time, the transatlantic community has been strained by the rise of China to great power status, with growing economic, technological and military potential. The global ambitions nurtured by the autocratic regime in Beijing have geostrategic implications for NATO. It seems that China is getting ready to compete with the United States for global leadership. For the U.S., in turn, China is now the key strategic competitor. As a result, the U.S. is shifting its strategic center of gravity toward the Indo-Pacific, with clear effects on its military-strategic planning, including the assignment of military forces. Future U.S. strategic orientation will have implications for NATO's focus, cohesion and effectiveness. In addition, there are indications that increasing Russian-Chinese cooperation, both political and military, may result in a strategic partnership, even an entente between the two autocratic powers. Were this to happen, it could sooner or later present the transatlantic community with two simultaneous strategic challenges, in the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific. Europe is itself jockeying for position within the emerging global power structures. This means taking appropriate strategic decisions while trying to maintain cohesion and overcoming the economic and political implications of the pandemic. But Europe's cohesion and ability to operate as a coherent geopolitical actor are at stake. Moreover, disruptive technologies of the "digital age" have far-reaching consequences in terms of security and defense, including military organization, armaments, logistics, and supply. In particular, Europeans must face the challenge of keeping pace with technological developments in the U.S. and China, while maintaining interoperability between American and European forces and remaining a valuable security partner for the U.S. In conclusion, NATO must address the implications for Euro-Atlantic security, first, of evolving global power structures and, second, of new technological developments. But it must retain focus on immediate challenges: containing the geopolitical threat from Russia and staving off spillover effects from instability and terrorism in the south. While NATO countries have agreed that increasing instability and violence in the south – including terrorist organizations – pose the most immediate asymmetric threat, Russia represents NATO's most serious potential threat, in military and geopolitical terms. As a consequence, while the alliance remains capable of responding to crises beyond its borders, renewed emphasis has in recent years been placed on deterrence and defense against Russia. With this in mind, this study on "Russia's Strategic Interests and Actions in the Baltic Region" is divided into two large sections. The first deals with Russia's geopolitical objectives, policy and strategy, and their effects across the wider Baltic Region. The second part sums up NATO's response to this evolving strategic challenge, including the potential military threat posed by Russia.

The EU and NATO are the largest barriers to Russian expansion

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, "RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION," <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

Standing in the way of Russia's expansionist ambitions are the EU and NATO, and above all the U.S. military presence in Europe. If NATO unity were sufficiently undermined, its decision-making capability paralyzed, its ability to defend itself undercut, the organization itself could collapse. Were that to happen, Russia would gain control over an open field; the expansion of Russian control over Europe would be almost automatic. This is why Russia is seeking to

undermine the Euro-Atlantic security order that emerged after the Cold War: its goal is to weaken NATO and the European Union (EU), disrupting Western initiatives and regional and global arrangements. In terms of a strategy to pursue its goals, the Russian government knows it cannot win a long-running war with the West, nor any strategic confrontation with NATO in the near future. So instead it focuses on undermining NATO's capability and its willingness to defend itself. To this end, Moscow has adopted a policy of permanent confrontation with the West. Its "Strategy of Active Defense" is designed as a long-term multi-domain campaign to de-stabilize individual NATO members and the alliance as a whole from within: to intimidate them from outside, compromise their decision-making and deny NATO effective military options for defense. For that purpose, Moscow applies a broad range of overt and covert, non-military and military instruments in an orchestrated way, measures tailored for peacetime, crisis and war. In peacetime, these "hybrid" operations remain below the threshold of direct military confrontation with NATO, blurring the boundaries between peace and conflict so as to create ambiguity, uncertainty and confusion. In this way, it can undermine effective responses.

NATO will have to face multi regional threats

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, "RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION," <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

Russia's military exercises, as well as experience gained in Ukraine, lead to the conclusion that NATO must be prepared to face multi-regional threats along its eastern borders and beyond. As Russia's Zapad exercises and hybrid operations during the Ukraine crisis have shown, any military conflict with NATO would likely not be confined to one region, but would in one way or another involve others along NATO's northern, eastern and south-eastern borders and adjacent seas. Moreover, besides fighting a partially covert, but conventional war in Ukraine, and maintaining political and military influence in Georgia and Moldova, in particular by protracting conflicts, Russia has continuously strengthened its positions in Syria and the broader Mediterranean region. In 2019, Moscow obtained a concession to use both Tartus seaport and Kheimim airbase for 49 years. Russian military presence in the Middle East is now becoming a permanent factor. In addition, Russia is increasingly involved in the war in Libya, providing paramilitary forces and delivering heavy equipment to the warlord Khalifa Haftar. By establishing a foothold in Libya, a key migration transit route from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe, Moscow may well become able to influence the flow of migrants to Europe, gaining a strong leverage over EU and NATO decision-making, and affecting the cohesion of the EU as well as individual NATO states. Russia is also increasing its military presence and activities in the Arctic region. This – as well as China's increasing involvement – gives rise to concerns as to whether coordination of interests and activities in the region should be solely left to the Arctic Council, or if NATO states' security interests are now directly involved. This involvement includes concrete military affairs, and also shipping, energy security, and environmental issues. The special status of Norway's Svalbard islands, and Greenland, where sentiments of independence are becoming stronger, further complicates future challenges NATO will have to face.

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Russia escalation/military superiority

Russia still presents many uncertainties and risks for escalation

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, “Consequences for NATO,” <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/consequences-for-nato-pub-75881>)

For NATO, the Russian challenge presents multiple uncertainties, which exacerbate the potential for disagreement. For starters, NATO members have different views of Moscow’s intentions in the post-Soviet space and toward the alliance. Some officials from certain members—including the three Baltic states, Poland, and the United States—have repeatedly claimed that the Kremlin is “revanchist,” in the sense that it purportedly wants to redraw the map of Europe.⁶ They argue that Russia’s aggressive actions in Ukraine demonstrate Moscow’s willingness to use force in the former Soviet republics. They fear that Moscow could even use military force against the alliance, particularly the Baltic states. At a minimum, they see Russia as a challenger of the status quo—a view diametrically opposed to Moscow’s view of itself. In addition, the states that see Russia as revanchist are mindful of Russian domestic politics and how these forces interact with the tensions with NATO. According to a popular—and probably correct—theory, Putin, confronted with an ailing Russian economy, to some extent may need the friction with NATO, and particularly with Washington, to hold on to power.⁷ According to this theory, Putin’s efforts to foster nationalistic support to divert attention from Russia’s deep-seated domestic problems could even force him to militarily test the alliance one day. Other NATO members—such as France, Germany, and Italy—seem rather skeptical that Moscow presents an immediate military threat to NATO and question the plausibility of Russia waging war against the world’s most powerful military alliance.⁸ Some former officials and analysts from these countries agree with the Kremlin’s view that NATO has moved too far east and understand how Russia could perceive NATO enlargement as a threat.⁹ This general disagreement about current and projected Russian intentions and interests is important because it exacerbates the potential for escalation for two quite different reasons. First, if NATO underestimates the threat from Russia, that may give Moscow reason to test the alliance’s resolve—maybe even by escalating to the use of military force against NATO’s weakest link, the Baltic states. In this case, an incorrect threat assessment by NATO could invite Moscow to deliberately escalate the already simmering general tensions with NATO and go a significant step further, perhaps by invading one of the Baltic states. Second, and conversely, if NATO overestimates the threat from Russia, its well-intentioned defensive measures may reinforce legitimate, as well as imagined, Russian security concerns. In this case, misreading the threat could lead NATO to create additional pressure on Moscow to up the ante, which could lead to both arms races and increased tensions—making escalation more likely. These two potential risks—of NATO doing too little and doing too much—create very specific escalation risks in the Baltic region, in both the conventional and nuclear realms.

Russia has been modernizing its military

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, “RUSSIA’S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION,” <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

After the war against Georgia in 2008, over the last decade Russia has systematically modernized its armed forces, in particular improving the readiness of conventional military forces, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Improvements have been especially marked in the Western Military District. The overhaul is a core element of its strategy, complemented by a steady increase in its defense budget in real terms almost steadily until 2015. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), in 2019 Russia's total military expenditure amounted to some \$62 billion, which corresponds to purchasing power in Russia of some \$164 billion. In 2018 and 2019, between 35 percent and 40 percent of Russia's total military expenditure was dedicated to equipment modernization. The Russian armed forces have benefited significantly from a decade of sustained investment. Today Russia's armed forces are seen as its most capable and functional forces since the end of the Cold War. The IISS has estimated, for example, total ground, naval infantry and airborne forces at about 136 battalion tactical groups (BTG) in 2019. Russian forces continue to focus on improving readiness: around half of all BTGs, some 55,000 to 65,000 personnel, are regarded as rapidly available for large-scale operations, capable of quick deployment. Moscow has used Syria to test this transformation of its forces and capabilities. The new Russian policy on nuclear deterrence, recently published, offers basic confirmation of – and occasionally more details on – the 2014 Military Doctrine on nuclear weapons in Russia's strategic thinking. According to some experts, the document is actually a redacted version of the 2010 nuclear deterrence policy, which was never released to the public. The new document confirms that Russia still regards nuclear weapons as a possible way of de-escalating conflicts, including potentially conventional conflicts. This fact is of paramount importance for NATO and the wider Baltic region, particularly since the document authorizes the use of nuclear weapons not only in second-strike retaliation to a nuclear attack, but also against conventional strikes with cruise missiles, or cyber-attacks with potential strategic effects, i.e. which "endanger the very existence of the state." The deliberately vague wording of this statement is open to interpretation by any Russian leadership.

Russia's military superiority could be a threat

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, "Consequences for NATO," <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/consequences-for-nato-pub-75881>)

The regional imbalance between NATO's and Russia's conventional forces, NATO's own deterrence loopholes, and the geography of the Baltics all make both deliberate and inadvertent escalation possible. Although NATO as a whole has much greater conventional military capabilities than Russia, Moscow enjoys a significant margin of conventional superiority in the wider Baltic region (see map). Russia has been heavily funding and modernizing its aging armed forces over the last decade, making them a credible force again. In addition, Moscow continues to expand its arsenal of long-range cruise missiles and other precision-guided munitions. To be fair, Russian modernization efforts continue to experience serious setbacks, as a result of widespread corruption and mismanagement, for instance. The Kremlin's goal of equipping 70 percent of its forces with the latest military equipment by 2020 is generally considered largely aspirational.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Western analysts assume that in case of an open military attack on one or more of the Baltic states, Russian forces would most likely overrun Baltic defenses within only a few days, presenting NATO with a military fait accompli.¹¹ Recognizing these

weaknesses, the NATO allies agreed at the 2016 Warsaw Summit to deploy four multinational battalions—a so-called Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP)—to the three Baltic states and Poland. NATO also agreed to increase the intensity and scope of its exercises in the region to deter Russian aggression and assure its eastern members. Separately, the United States has sent additional forces and military equipment under a U.S. national program known as the European Deterrence Initiative. (See Box 1 for a description of the forces deployed under the EFP and the European Deterrence Initiative.)

Russia is threatening peace in Ukraine

Shlapak and Johnson 2016 (David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, 2016, RAND corporation, “Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO’s Eastern Flank,” https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html)

Russia’s recent aggression against Ukraine has disrupted nearly a generation of relative peace and stability between Moscow and its Western neighbors and raised concerns about its larger intentions. From the perspective of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the threat to the three Baltic Republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—former Soviet republics, now member states that border Russian territory—may be the most problematic. In a series of wargames conducted between summer 2014 and spring 2015, the RAND Corporation examined the shape and probable outcome of a near-term Russian invasion of the Baltic states. The games’ findings are unambiguous: As currently postured, NATO cannot successfully defend the territory of its most exposed members. Across multiple games using a wide range of expert participants in and out of uniform playing both sides, the longest it has taken Russian forces to reach the outskirts of the Estonian and/or Latvian capitals of Tallinn and Riga, respectively, is 60 hours. Such a rapid defeat would leave NATO with a limited number of options, all bad: a bloody counteroffensive, fraught with escalatory risk, to liberate the Baltics; to escalate itself, as it threatened to do to avert defeat during the Cold War; or to concede at least temporary defeat, with uncertain but predictably disastrous consequences for the Alliance and, not incidentally, the people of the Baltics. Fortunately, avoiding such a swift and catastrophic failure does not appear to require a Herculean effort. Further gaming indicates that a force of about seven brigades, including three heavy armored brigades—adequately supported by airpower, land-based fires, and other enablers on the ground and ready to fight at the onset of hostilities—could suffice to prevent the rapid overrun of the Baltic states. While not sufficient to mount a sustained defense of the region or to achieve NATO’s ultimate end state of restoring its members’ territorial integrity, such a posture would fundamentally change the strategic picture as seen from Moscow. Instead of being able to confront NATO with a stunning coup de main that cornered it as described above, an attack on the Baltics would instead trigger a prolonged and serious war between Russia and a materially far wealthier and more powerful coalition, a war Moscow must fear it would be likely to lose. Crafting this deterrent posture would not be inexpensive in absolute terms, with annual costs perhaps running on the order of \$2.7 billion. That is not a small number, but seen in the context of an Alliance with an aggregate gross domestic product in excess of \$35 trillion and combined yearly defense spending of more than \$1 trillion, it hardly appears unaffordable, especially in comparison with the potential costs of failing to defend NATO’s most exposed and vulnerable allies—that is, of potentially inviting a devastating war, rather than deterring it.

Russia has multiple military objectives that involve the Baltics

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, "RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION," <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

Russia's current overall military posture is defined by a strategy based on its security and geopolitical interests as outlined above. Current deployments include its continuing aggressive action against Ukraine, its positions in Moldova and in the north Caucasus, including the occupation of some Georgian territory, as well as its involvement in Syria. The Baltic region directly faces Russia's Western Military District (WMD). In case of military conflict, this district would be responsible for confronting NATO, and thus is traditionally one of the strongest. In 2019, Russia continued to strengthen its forces in the WMD, directed against NATO and Europe: the district now includes three army commands, five new division headquarters, and 15 new mechanized regiments. Although some units are currently deployed close to Eastern Ukraine, due to the ongoing conflict there, the Russian armed forces has the following units located near the Baltic states: one guards air assault division, the first of Russian airborne unit to include a third manned air assault regiment, and one Spetsnaz brigade, both stationed in Pskov (about 32 km from Estonia); two motorized rifle brigades; one artillery brigade and one missile brigade, equipped with 12 dual-use Iskander missiles; one army aviation brigade and one air defense regiment, equipped with S-300 missiles. Given geography, Russia holds a clear time-forces-distance advantage vis-à-vis the Baltic states and thereby NATO in the region. On the one hand, this is composed of the Baltic states' exposed location, the size of their defense forces, and NATO's peacetime force posture; on the other, the posture, size and readiness of the Russian forces in the WMD. Even discounting Russian forces in Kaliningrad, Russia is thought to have absolute military supremacy in peacetime, in terms of tanks, fighter aircraft, rocket artillery and short-range ballistic missiles (Iskander). NATO's military planners have assessed that the Russian military leadership could additionally rapidly deploy 50,000 to 60,000 troops in a few days. It would be able to mass large forces anywhere on Russia's western borders, capable of incursion into one or all Baltic states at short notice. Furthermore, Russia's significant forces in the Kaliningrad Oblast could aggravate NATO's military disadvantage. These allow Russia to threaten the Baltic states from two directions and could delay or even impede rapid NATO reinforcement of the Baltic states in a conflict (see chapters 2.2.1 to 2.2.3). As pointed out by many scholars, one of the main objectives of Russia's ongoing defense reform and military transformation has been to significantly improve the readiness and effectiveness of its armed forces. The emphasis is on rapid mobilization, superb mobility, including across military districts, and high firepower. The Russian military leadership has reportedly put much effort into developing the concept of "preventive military action" in recent years, aiming to compensate for a shortfall of conventional capabilities compared to NATO by being faster and more vigorous in deployment and tenacity. If a crisis or conflict with NATO were to arise in the Baltic region, Russia would depend on its ability to swiftly mobilize, move, and concentrate forces. It would aim to take decisive action well before NATO could effectively respond militarily and launch high-intensity defensive operations.

Kaliningrad plays a special role in Russia's military strategy

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, "RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION," <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

The exclave of Kaliningrad constitutes a crucial, highly unusual asset for Russia in the Baltic region. The former city of Königsberg and the surrounding region de facto became part of the Soviet Union in 1945 and remained part of the Russian Federation even after the dissolution of the USSR. Kaliningrad is Russia's only all-year ice-free port on the Baltic Sea. Since 1996, the Kaliningrad region has enjoyed the status of a Special Economic Zone within the Russian Federation, resulting in steady economic growth. Ever since Soviet times, Kaliningrad has been strongly militarized, serving as the home port of large parts of Russia's Baltic Fleet, as well as hosting considerable aviation, air defense and ground forces. As of 2018 Russian ground forces in Kaliningrad included a motorized rifle brigade, a motorized rifle regiment, a tank regiment, a naval infantry brigade as well as strong artillery, air and missile defense and aviation forces. The majority of Baltic Fleet vessels are located at Baltiysk, with the remainder of the fleet located close to St. Petersburg. The Baltic Fleet includes two vessels equipped with Kalibr missiles, thus presenting a significant long-range conventional and theatre nuclear precision-strike capability vis-à-vis Europe. Kaliningrad is separated from Belarus, a close military ally of Russia, by the so-called 'Suwalki corridor', a narrow strip of land spanning the border between Poland and Lithuania. Both Western and Russian military literature more or less takes it for granted that controlling the "Suwalki corridor" would be of key importance in any military confrontation between NATO and Russia in the region. If Russia seized and closed the corridor, it would cut land connections between the Baltic States and other NATO allies, significantly complicating reinforcement. However, it is not at all clear that Russia could create a Crimea-type scenario here, mobilizing ethnic Russians and deploying "little green men" in the Suwalki region. The region is ethnically heterogenic, and "little green men" would be noticed very quickly. Moreover, the Baltic states are willing and prepared to defend their countries, and very much prepared to immediately counter hostile Russian hybrid tactics, in particular possible mobilizations of Russian minorities. In case of a confrontation, Russia is likely not to repeat the Ukraine scenario, but instead turn to a swift, decisive conventional attack supported by hybrid means (for example, with disinformation or cyber-attacks). Aims would include rapid closure of the "corridor," using forces from both Kaliningrad and Belarus.

Russia's A2AD system is a threat

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, "RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION," <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

Since the Cold War, Moscow has continuously developed Anti-Access and Area Denial (A2AD) capabilities, aiming to protect regions of strategic importance and its ability to make war against NATO operations in a conflict situation, especially in countering NATO's aerial and naval superiority. Russia also gained combat experience both in Ukraine and in Syria. The war in Eastern Ukraine has probably been the first conflict in history where air forces (Ukraine's) were successfully blocked solely using ground-based air defense weapons (Russia's). Moscow used air

defense weapons both in the occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine and within Russia. In summer 2014, Russian air defenses caused such severe losses to Ukraine's military aviation that Kyiv never again used its air forces against the separatists. In general, Russia's A2AD capability represents a complex system of systems designed to deny adversary forces – on the ground, at sea or in the air – freedom of movement within and across an area of operations. Another way of describing the system of systems is as a set of multiple, mutually reinforcing military means. These include overlapping air defense systems, long-range artillery, high-precision strike capabilities (short- and medium-range conventional or nuclear ballistic missiles and cruise missiles), anti-ship and anti-submarine weapons, and electronic warfare systems. Together these capabilities create a multi-layered, comprehensive defense of key regions. For example, during the Soviet era, Kaliningrad was surrounded by allies and Russia controlled over half the Baltic coastline, but today Moscow sees the region as encircled by NATO, and thus a vulnerability. It maintains the Baltic Fleet in part to defend Kaliningrad, and to hinder NATO seaborne reinforcement of the Baltic region. For NATO, in turn, Kaliningrad is a kind of forward-deployed Russian military fortress within NATO's territory, from which Russia could support military operations to cut off the Baltic states from the rest of NATO territory. Around the Baltic Sea region, Russia has created further A2AD layers through locating considerable assets in Kaliningrad, and in the western area of the Western Military District: the Pskov, Smolensk and St. Petersburg regions. Massive Russian A2AD capabilities in the wider Baltic region constitute a particular challenge to NATO in conducting ground, maritime and air operations, in particular the deployment of NATO forces to the Baltic States to reinforce national defense forces. Hence, Russia's A2AD capability here also provides a capability to project military power, enabling it to delay, impede or even deny movement of NATO forces in the area. The logic behind this kind of concentrated A2AD 'bubble' is to help Russia to outmatch NATO forces when and where it can really make a difference. That said, Russia's A2AD capabilities are in theory just as vulnerable to military strikes as any other weapon system. Hence, the Russian military has put strong emphasis on improving the readiness and maneuverability of its forces, to quickly move them out of harm's way if necessary. This also applies to A2AD assets. All in all, suppression and defeat of Russia's A2AD assets in the Baltic region would require significant military efforts and resources in any military conflict.

Russia is conducting strategic military exercises

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, "RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION," <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

Russian understandings of modern war and modern victory are reflected in its military doctrine and literature, but also in the design and scenarios used in military exercises. In case of military conflict, Russia's strategy focuses on achieving military superiority vis-à-vis NATO forces not by outnumbering or outgunning them, but by moving faster and acting more decisively than NATO is thought capable of, using surprise as well as overwhelming firepower. The overall aim is to present NATO with a fait accompli before it can effectively respond. Being prepared to use nuclear weapons to persuade NATO to stand down is an integral and important part of this approach. The Russian strategic-level exercises Zapad (meaning West in Russian) conducted in the Western Military District on a quadrennial basis have served to rehearse Russia's war plans

against NATO and against the U.S. in Europe. Over time, these exercises have become increasingly detailed and complex. Furthermore, Russia routinely conducts short-notice readiness exercises close to NATO's borders to demonstrate, test and improve its capabilities and to test NATO response. The fact that these exercises are often in violation of conventional arms control agreements is not the key point. A closer examination of Russia's recent military exercises reveals that Moscow has long been preparing for a major, high-intensity conflict against NATO. Fighting such a war is not among Russia's preferred objectives, nor is the outbreak of such a conflict likely. However, the exercises help to develop the skills of Russian forces, giving military leadership options in pursuing strategy, forming an important element of Moscow's hybrid warfare, and sending clear deterrence messages to the West. Also, in keeping with traditional, capability-focused logic, the Russian military has also been regularly training and exercising for large-scale, high-intensity scenarios. In this context, it is worth pointing out the important role played by civilian agencies in Russia's defense planning. Since at least 2013, ministries and agencies with armed forces, including the federal security service FSB and the Ministry of Interior (MVD), the Ministry of Emergency Situations, defense industry companies and civilian actors in Russia's military organizations have all been involved in efforts to support the armed forces during wartime. Since then, as well as the armed forces, strategic exercises have involved the regular participation of other elements of Russia's military organization, including many different agencies and ministries, federal and regional. In addition, readiness checks for wartime conditions also take place in civilian agencies, including the ministries of health, agriculture, industry and commerce, and federal agencies for medical-biological issues, state reserves, and regional administrations. A detailed analysis of Russia's strategic military exercises between 2009 and 2017 reveals that, over the last ten years, Russia has clearly strengthened the fighting power of its military, in terms of readiness, mobility, command and control, quantity of forces, and actual fighting power. Besides, the scale of exercises indicates that, while in the mid-2000s Russia was preparing for small-scale local wars, in the 2010s it has also been training for large-scale conflicts, including against NATO countries. Another important study has pointed out how Russia actually imagined large-scale war against NATO in the Baltic region, using the Zapad-2017 exercise as an indicator. After compiling and comparing several Russian military exercises in 2017, Daivis Petraitis argued that combining the exercises reveals a strategy of a three-stage major conflict against NATO in the Baltic region, as imagined by Russian military planners. in Stage One, Russian forces would conduct a swift, combined forces assault aimed at capturing key political and military targets, supported by long-range precision guided missiles launched from bombers and nuclear submarines, air strikes, electronic warfare capabilities, as well as extensive special operations. Ground offensives would be launched both from the Pskov and Smolensk regions, and from Kaliningrad, first by rapid reaction forces, followed by other units from the Western Military District, later from other districts. once the initial offensive had achieved its desired goals, other exercises modelled State Two of the same conflict. According to Petraitis, elements of the official Zapad 2017 exercise emulated parts of Stage Two, with a massive, joint forces offensive aimed at repelling enemy counter-attacks and stabilizing assets and positions captured in Stage One.

Russia's forces are superior and pose a major concern

Shlapak and Johnson 2016 (David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, 2016, RAND corporation, "Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank," https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html)

First and obviously, the overall correlation of forces was dramatically in Russia's favor. Although the two sides' raw numbers of maneuver battalions—22 for Russia and 12 for NATO—are not badly disproportionate, seven of NATO's are those of Estonia and Latvia, which are extremely light, lack tactical mobility, and are poorly equipped for fighting against an armored opponent. Indeed, the only armor in the NATO force is the light armor in a single Stryker battalion, which is credited with having deployed from Germany during the crisis buildup prior to the conflict. NATO has no main battle tanks in the field. Meanwhile, all Russia's forces are motorized, mechanized, or tank units. Even their eight airborne battalions are equipped with light armored vehicles, unlike their U.S. counterparts. Second, Russia also enjoys an overwhelming advantage in tactical and operational fires. The Russian order of battle includes ten artillery battalions (three equipped with tube artillery and seven with multiple-rocket launchers), in addition to the artillery that is organic to the maneuver units themselves. NATO has no independent fires units at all, and the light units involved in the fight are poorly endowed with organic artillery. Third, NATO's light forces were not only outgunned by the much heavier Russian units, but their lack of maneuver ability meant that they could be pinned and bypassed if the Russian players so desired. By and large, NATO's infantry found themselves unable even to retreat successfully and were destroyed in place. Finally, while NATO airpower was generally able to take a substantial toll on advancing Russian troops, without adequate NATO ground forces to slow the attack's momentum, there is simply not enough time to inflict sufficient attrition to halt the assault. Airpower is rate limited, and against a moderately competent adversary—which is how we portrayed the Russian Air Force—NATO's air forces had multiple jobs to do, including suppressing Russia's arsenal of modern surface-to-air defenses and defending against possible air attacks on NATO forces and rear areas. This further limited NATO air's ability to affect the outcome of the war on the ground. Without heavy NATO ground forces to force the attackers to slow their rate of advance and assume postures that increased their vulnerability to air strikes, Russian players could meter their losses to air by choosing how to array and move their forces.

INF violations

Russia's violations of INF need to be addressed

Carnegie Endowment for National Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, "NATO's Options," <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/nato-s-options-pub-75883>)

Those short-term options are unlikely to spark much contention within NATO because they would not undermine deterrence, assurance, or alliance unity. However, implementing them in the current political environment would be difficult because Russia reaps benefits from appearing unpredictable. Going beyond these initial measures to address the risk of accidental escalation and engaging Russia on more far-reaching CSBMs and arms control measures would be even more difficult. On this front, NATO should start to put more intellectual effort into identifying what specific measures would increase allies' security. First, allies' concerns about large-scale Russian exercises close to NATO territory highlight a lack of transparency and predictability that could be mitigated by mutually agreed-upon CSBMs, such as an updated version of the OSCE's Vienna Document addressing snap exercises, as well as large ones broken down into multiple components. Second, mitigating the risks that stem from the numerical imbalance in regional conventional forces should be possible if the two sides can devise limitations on heavy conventional weaponry. The worst-case scenario for NATO would be a Russian attack against one of the alliance's militarily weak eastern members. For such an attack to be successful, Russia would have to use its tanks, armored vehicles, aircraft, and helicopters. Enabling technologies such as cruise missiles, command and control assets, and air defense systems- are crucial for such operations, but they cannot seize and hold enemy territory. This reality points to the continued utility of an arms control arrangement limiting states' ability to move boots on the ground. As the Cold War ended, NATO and the Warsaw Pact agreed to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), which reduced and limited five specified types of conventional military land and air equipment in designated geographical zones. In 2007, Moscow suspended the CFE Treaty in reaction to NATO making the ratification of an Adapted CFE Treaty conditional on Russia's withdrawing remaining weapons and personnel from secessionist regions in Georgia and Moldova.¹⁷ Even though the treaty is de facto still in place, without Russia's participation it has lost much of its utility. Still, particularly in today's tense environment, a CFE-type arrangement could increase security on NATO's eastern flank. Since many of the current military tensions emanate from the Baltic Sea, perhaps a naval arms control component could be added, though addressing rapid naval military movements could prove difficult. NATO should be mindful, too, of the critics of a conventional arms control approach. Critics from the Baltics, in particular, voice concerns that regional limitations on conventional forces, even if reciprocal, would solidify the notion of an alliance with different zones of security, thus undermining assurance and unity.¹⁸ While this perception certainly has its merits, NATO allies should convince the Baltic states that more security can be built around increased deterrence and assurance, ideally coupled with reciprocal arms control arrangements. Perhaps the greatest obstacle would be overcoming Russian reluctance to engage on conventional limitations, given that the regional balance of power is still in its favor. Perhaps the greatest obstacle would be overcoming Russian reluctance to engage on conventional limitations, given that the regional balance of power is still in its favor and that Moscow has not completed its conventional force modernization program. Moreover, regional limitations would entail

geographical limits in Russia's Western Military District in particular. Russia generally has had problems accepting such limits, even under the terms of the original CFE Treaty. That said, over the long run, the cause is not hopeless. Russia's regional military superiority and NATO's military superiority across Europe as a whole could allow for some kind of mutually beneficial deal. If that were impossible to achieve, NATO could still use the threat of additional deployments as leverage for pressing Moscow on arms control. As a matter of fact, the Kremlin would be loath to accept additional permanent NATO deployments to the Baltic states and Poland, should the allies, at some point, agree on the necessity of such a step. Back in the late 1970s, NATO used a similar strategy to respond to the Soviet missile buildup. While threatening to reciprocate Soviet actions with its own missile buildup, NATO made a concrete offer of dialogue and arms control. A few years later, and after NATO had put its threat to the test, Moscow finally came to the table. The resulting U.S.-Soviet INF Treaty eliminated all those intermediate-range missiles that NATO and the Soviets found most threatening. In a similar fashion, any potential additional NATO force deployments to the Baltics should include an offer of dialogue to Moscow with the aim of forging a new regional and reciprocal conventional arms control mechanism. Such a mechanism, if successfully concluded and implemented, could make additional deployments redundant. Finally, allies could try to use the ongoing INF crisis in a similar way. If Russia does not return to compliance with the INF Treaty, U.S. military deployments become increasingly likely within the next few years.¹⁹ Washington and its allies could use the pending threat of these deployments as an opening bid for broader talks with Russia about European security and arms control. If arms control talks were to result in a satisfactory outcome, NATO could renounce its arms buildup. To be successful, such an approach would have to be carefully timed, have broad support within the alliance, and be carefully communicated to Russia. The new U.S. NPR tries to establish such a link when arguing that pursuing a new U.S. sea-based nuclear cruise missile "will provide a needed non-strategic regional presence, an assured response capability, and an INF-Treaty compliant response to Russia's continuing Treaty violation."²⁰ The NPR states further that "if Russia returns to compliance with its arms control obligations, reduces its non-strategic nuclear arsenal, and corrects its other destabilizing behaviors, the United States may reconsider the pursuit of a SLCM [submarine-launched cruise missile]."²¹ Unfortunately, this approach is not very promising because the linkage established by the NPR is too broad and goes well beyond the issue of the alleged Russian INF Treaty violation. In particular, the NPR does not definitively promise to cease the SLCM program if Russia complies with U.S. demands.

Russia has violated numerous international agreements in its quest for power

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, "RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION," <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

Through its aggressive actions against Ukraine in 2014, including the illegal annexation of Crimea, Russia not only violated numerous international agreements, it also contravened a fundamental political principle of Euro-Atlantic security: no border changes by military force. Since then, Russia has been in violation of numerous key treaties and agreements relevant to Europe's security and stability since the end of the Cold War. The Russian leadership has demonstrated its willingness to attain its geopolitical goals even by threat of and the use of force, as long as it can do so with what it considers manageable risk. These actions have

fundamentally changed Europe's security environment. Moreover, through military intervention in Syria, Russia has demonstrated its readiness to project military power to regions outside Europe in a way that challenges American and NATO influence in a region vital to NATO's and Europe's security. According to most experts, Moscow's strategic thinking and actions are based on a combination of defensive and offensive factors, rooted in Russia's history, geography and aspirations. President Putin's regime defines itself by political demarcation from and cultural opposition to Western democracies. We can identify four major beliefs, overlapping and mutually reinforcing: The continued existence of the autocratic system of rule must be secured by all means, ostensibly out of concern for Russia's stability and security. Only a strong, centralized state is seen as capable of safely holding together this huge country, with well over one hundred ethnic groups. In this context, law and order serve to secure power. A self-image of Russia as unique – in sheer size, imperial history and status as a nuclear power – makes the Kremlin believe it has a natural right to be recognized as a great power and act accordingly, on an equal footing with the United States. Its relationship with the U.S. is seen as one of global rivalry: wherever possible, Russia aims to reduce the United States' position in the world, while improving its own. Russia has a constant sense of encirclement and containment by the West. This, and a neverending concern about securing and protecting its borders – some 60.000 kilometers overall, one third of which are land borders – have led to a near-insatiable need for absolute security, and a belief that dangers must be kept far away from the Russian heartland. In conjunction with its perceived need for security, Russia considers politics and security as zero-sum games: Russian security comes at the expense of others' security, above all neighboring states. As a consequence, Moscow's actions in foreign, security and defense policy have been designed to restore Russia's great power status while at the same time re-establishing the cordon sanitaire it enjoyed until the end of the Cold War. In particular, it wants to regain control of Russia's "near abroad," making demands for an allegedly historically justified "zone of privileged interest." This would come at the expense of the sovereignty and security of neighboring states. While Russia's actions may have defensive origins, these insecurities are manifested in an aggressive and unpredictable manner.

Lithuania

Lithuania is in a precarious position

Judaon 2019 (Jen Judson, July 16 2019, “Do the Baltics need more US military support to deter Russia?” Defense News. <https://www.defensenews.com/land/2019/07/15/do-the-baltics-need-more-us-military-support-to-deter-russia/>)

Lithuania, in a tenuous position bordering Belarus and Kaliningrad, has dramatically ramped up its military capability since Russia’s move on Crimea. Lithuania is joined to Poland by a short 40-mile border — the Suwalki Gap — that separates Belarus from Kaliningrad. Should Russian forces close the gap, it would isolate Lithuania and its northern Baltic state neighbors from the rest of Europe. The country hasn’t sat idly by, waiting for Europe or America to help; it has taken steps to modernize its military by buying new infantry fighting vehicles, tactical vehicles, howitzers and medium-range air defense systems, and it’s grown its ranks by adding another brigade and reinstating conscriptions. Lithuania also met the NATO pledge to spend 2 percent of its gross domestic product on defense in 2018, and it’s planning to increase that effort to 2.5 percent by 2030. But despite Lithuania’s military buildup and its Eastern European neighbors’ moves to strengthen defense of the eastern front, Russia continues to build up its military might in the Western Military District, increase cooperation in military exercises with Belarus, and militarize Kaliningrad with missiles and tanks, all to make Russia capable of succeeding in a regional conflict. Then there are the allegations of Russia’s unconventional operations in the gray zone of conflict aimed at fracturing NATO and Europe by tampering with elections, engaging in cyberattacks and attempting to influence populations through false narratives in social media. When officials in Lithuania were asked what types of American military units it might want most, they were hesitant to provide specifics but reiterated the importance of U.S. presence. The U.S. Army currently deploys 6,000 soldiers throughout seven countries as part of Atlantic Resolve in three separate rotations — armored, aviation and logistical — according to a U.S. Army Europe spokeswoman. In Lithuania specifically, the Pennsylvania National Guard, through the State Partnership Program, has traveled to the country on more than 275 occasions and conducted over 600 security cooperation engagements, the spokeswoman told Defense News. There is also a unit-based partnership between the 2nd Cavalry Regiment and the Iron Wolf and Griffin brigades.

Status quo insufficient

NATO currently doesn't do enough

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, "Consequences for NATO," <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/consequences-for-nato-pub-75881>)

Some Western analysts have criticized NATO's deterrence and assurance measures for not doing enough to meaningfully mitigate the risk of deliberate Russian escalation. They worry that NATO's current policy may still leave Moscow tempted to test the alliance with its superior conventional forces unless NATO follows up with a strategy for overcoming Russian A2/AD capabilities and enabling swift reinforcement.²⁸ Others have argued for the additional deployment of large-scale, mainly U.S. troops to the region to help bypass the reinforcement problem.²⁹ According to war games conducted by the RAND Corporation, NATO would probably need seven heavily armed brigades (of about 35,000 personnel) permanently deployed in the region to prevent a Russian fait accompli and an additional nine to fourteen maneuver brigades (of up to about 70,000 personnel) as reinforcements to drive Russian forces back.³⁰ Officials from the region have echoed some of these concerns. Baltic officials, in particular, argue in private conversations for additional deployments—particularly of U.S. forces—to their countries, though on a much more limited scale than proposed in the RAND study. They express an expectation that current deterrence and assurance measures are only the starting point for a larger effort aimed at modernizing and streamlining NATO's overall command structure, and they maintain that the next steps must include efforts to permanently secure reinforcement routes, to have reinforcement personnel ready at all times, and to provide indigenous Baltic forces with advanced equipment, such as air defense systems, needed to win time in any war with Russia.³¹

NATO needs to confront Russia's strategic posture

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, "RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION," <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

As outlined above, Russia's "Strategy of Active Defense" –which immediately supports Moscow's policy of permanent confrontation and strategic intimidation of the transatlantic community – is designed to weaken, undermine and destabilize NATO and allied governments and societies from within, in peacetime and even more so in a crisis. It is also meant to achieve options for exerting pressure and applying coercion from outside, and to deny NATO any effective military option, particular in a crisis and short of open war. If a crisis were to evolve into a war, Russia would strive for rapid, decisive military advantage and deny NATO any successful military response, thus keeping any military conflict confined to a short war. Two interdependent factors are of particular concern in Russian strategy: first, Russia's continuous efforts, as described above, to achieve regional military superiority with conventional forces on NATO's borders. Rapidly available forces, which Russia can deploy within days and mass on Russia's western border, along with long-range strike capabilities to disable NATO's military defense, grant Moscow the option of rapid regional attack to achieve a limited land grab, before NATO can effectively react. This would be accompanied by cyberattacks, disinformation

campaigns, and subversive actions on NATO territory. Second, Russia's use of nuclear weapons as operational means in a crisis or war. The breach of the INF Treaty by Russia and the deployment of the new intermediate-range dual-capable (conventional and nuclear) missiles SSC-8 has drawn attention to Russia's significant arsenal of sub-strategic air-, sea- and land-based nuclear weapons, capable of striking European capital cities as well as key civilian and military infrastructure nodes, NATO infrastructure essential for conducting operations and reinforcing threatened allies. Russian nuclear weapons could thus underpin a regional conventional attack: they could cover almost the whole of Europe but leave U.S. territory unaffected. As a consequence, in a conflict, Europe's security could be decoupled from that of America and the U.S. and its extended nuclear deterrence undermined. This could lead Moscow to believe it could present NATO with a fait accompli, paralyze allies' decision-making and undercut commitment to collective defense obligations. The Kremlin might conclude it could convince NATO to stand down in the face of nuclear escalation. In the worst case, attempts at blackmail through combined conventional and nuclear threats could disrupt NATO, and Russia could in this way achieve strategic success without a long war. As a result, NATO needs to contest Russia's strategic intimidation efforts, denying it any options for achieving its desired political effects. Three priorities are to be pursued: fostering state and societal resilience against malicious cyber activities and disinformation, denying Russia the success of a limited attack with conventional forces, and developing countermeasures to negate Russia's regional nuclear threat.

3.3.2 NATO's Comprehensive Adaptation Program Given the geopolitical circumstances in Europe and the length of NATO's eastern border, potential threats could emanate from a variety of regions – from the north and North Atlantic through the Baltic and Black Sea regions to the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Middle East. This range of potential threats requires NATO to retain maximum awareness, flexibility and agility to ensure it has the right forces in the right place at the right time. Geography, however, imposes a critical time-distance gap between the possible deployment of superior Russian forces and the build-up of substantial NATO forces through reinforcement along the border. This is particularly true for the Baltic states and Poland, which share a common border with Russia and Belarus, respectively. As described above, Russia's A2AD capabilities could, in a conflict, impede rapid movement of Allied forces into and across the Baltic or Black Sea regions. So there is need for Allied forces to have appropriate enduring forward presence in these regions. At the same time, NATO has to ensure it is capable of rapid and effective reinforcement of a threatened ally or allies with capable combat forces, wherever and whenever needed. Consequently, resilience, responsiveness, readiness and rapid reinforcement are the key imperatives for strengthening NATO's deterrence and defense posture. All of these depend on rapid decision-making, sufficient forces at high readiness and the capacity to move them swiftly over great distances – three factors that are of utmost importance. These ideas require a shift in the Allies' strategic mindset. For many years, NATO's focused on out-of-area crises and discretionary crisis-response operations with long preparation times. Nowadays, deterrence and defense, adapted to current political and geostrategic circumstances, and the possibility of non-discretionary collective defense operations on short notice, are back at the heart of the alliance's strategic thinking and necessitate reinvigorating a culture of readiness across NATO.

NATO forces need more military power to defeat Russia

Shlapak and Johnson 2016 (David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, 2016, RAND corporation, “Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank,” https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html)

In addition to assessing the viability of NATO's current posture, our games explored enhancement options for creating a force that could deny Russia a swift victory in the first three days.¹² Avoiding the fait accompli is valuable because it begins to present Russia with the risk of a conventional defeat and thereby is at least the beginning of a more credible deterrent. On the one hand, Russia today looks to its northwest and sees little between its forces and the Baltic Sea but highway and the prospect of forcing NATO into the three-sided corner described above. Our goal was to devise a posture that would present an alternative landscape: one of a serious war with NATO, with all the dangers and uncertainties such an undertaking would entail, including the likelihood of ultimate defeat at the hands of an alliance that is materially far wealthier and more powerful than Russia. Nations can be tempted or can talk themselves into wars that they believe will be quick, cheap, victories that are “over by Christmas” but, historically, are far less likely to choose to embark on conflicts that they expect to be protracted, costly, and of uncertain outcome. We set out to identify at least one plausible NATO posture that would change Moscow's calculus in this scenario from the former to the latter. Our results strongly suggest that a posture that could credibly deny the fait accompli can be achieved without fielding anything like the eight corps that defended NATO's Cold War border with the Warsaw Pact. A total force of six or seven brigades, including at least three heavy brigades, backed by NATO's superior air and naval power and supported by adequate artillery, air defenses, and logistics capabilities, on the ground and ready to fight at the onset of hostilities appears able to avoid losing the war within the first few days. Not all these forces would need to be forward stationed. Given even a week of warning, NATO should be able to deploy several brigades of light infantry to the Baltics. Soldiers from the U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team in Italy and the 82nd Airborne Division in North Carolina could be airlifted in within a few days, as could similar units from other NATO countries, including the United Kingdom and France. U.S. Army combat aviation assets rotationally based in Germany could self-deploy to provide some mobile antiarmor firepower, but by and large, these fast-arriving forces would be best suited to digging in to defend urban areas. In our games, the NATO players almost universally chose to employ them in that way in and immediately around Tallinn and Riga.¹³ What cannot get there in time are the kinds of armored forces required to engage their Russian counterparts on equal terms, delay their advance, expose them to more-frequent and more-effective attacks from air- and land-based fires, and subject them to spoiling counterattacks. Coming from the United States, such units would take, at best, several weeks to arrive, and the U.S. Army currently has no heavy armor stationed in Europe. America's European allies have minimal combat-ready heavy forces. At the height of the Cold War, West Germany fielded three active corps of armored and mechanized units; today, its fleet of main battle tanks has shrunk from more than 2,200 to around 250. The United Kingdom is planning on removing all its permanently stationed forces from Germany by 2019; currently, only one British brigade headquarters, that of the 20th Armoured Infantry, remains in continental Europe, and the British government is committed to its withdrawal as a cost-saving measure. The quickest-

responding NATO heavy armor force would likely be a U.S. combined arms battalion, the personnel for which would fly in and mate up with the prepositioned equipment of the European Activity Set stored in Grafenwoehr, Germany.¹⁴ Getting this unit into the fight is a complicated process that will not be instantaneous. Breaking out the equipment—24 M-1 main battle tanks, 30 M-2 infantry fighting vehicles, assorted support vehicles—preparing it for movement, transporting it by rail across Poland, offloading it, and roadmarching it forward into the battle area are unlikely to take less than a week to 10 days.¹⁵ Providing adequate heavy armor early enough to make a difference is the biggest challenge to NATO's ability to prevent a rapid Russian overrun of Estonia and Latvia. It is critical to emphasize that this relatively modest force is not sufficient to mount a forward defense of the Baltic states or to sustain a defense indefinitely. It is intended to keep NATO from losing the war early, enabling but not itself achieving the Alliance's ultimate objectives of restoring the territorial integrity and political independence of its members. But it should eliminate the possibility of a quick Russian coup de main against the Baltic states, enhancing deterrence of overt, opportunistic aggression. There are several options for posturing the necessary heavy forces, each carrying different combinations of economic costs and political and military risks. For example, NATO could permanently station fully manned and equipped brigades forward in the Baltic states; could preposition the equipment in the Baltics, Poland, or Germany and plan to fly in the soldiers in the early stages of a crisis; could rely on rotational presence; or could employ some combination of these approaches. The next phase of our analysis will explore a range of these options to begin assessing their relative strengths and weaknesses.

Increasing military strength denies Russia an easy victory

Shlapak and Johnson 2016 (David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, 2016, RAND corporation, "Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank," https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html)

It is unclear whether denial of the prospect for a rapid victory would suffice to deter Russia from gambling on an attack on the "Baltic three," were it inclined to contemplate one. What seems certain is that NATO's current posture, which appears to offer Moscow the opportunity for a quick and relatively cheap win, does not.¹⁶ It is also important to point out that, critical though they are, maneuver brigades are insufficient in and of themselves. Armor and infantry battalions must be adequately supported with artillery, air defense, logistics, and engineering. Over the past 15 years, the Army has reduced the amount of artillery organic to its divisions and has essentially stripped out all air defense artillery from its maneuver forces. Further, there are presently no fires brigades in Europe able to augment the modest number of guns at the brigade and battalion level. This is in marked contrast to Russian tables of organization and equipment, which continue to feature substantial organic fires and air defense artillery, as well as numerous independent tube and rocket artillery and surface-to-air missile units. This disparity has had substantial impacts in our wargames. In one instance, in which NATO was playing with an enhanced force posture, the Blue team sought to use a U.S. armor brigade combat team (ABCT) to fight what was in essence a covering force action to delay the advance of a major Russian thrust through Latvia. A critical element of such a tactic is the use of fires to cover the maneuver elements as they seek to disengage and move back to their next defensive position. In this case, however, the ABCT was so thoroughly outgunned by the attacking Red force, which was

supported by multiple battalions of tube and rocket artillery in addition to that of the battalion tactical groups themselves, that the battalion on one flank of the brigade was overwhelmed and destroyed as it sought to break contact, and the rest were forced to retreat to avoid the same fate. The lack of air defenses in U.S. maneuver forces showed up in another game, in which two arriving NATO heavy brigades were organized into a counterattack aimed at the flank of a Russian thrust toward Riga.¹⁷ Because the Russian Air Force is sufficiently powerful to resist NATO's quest for air superiority for multiple days, the Red team was able to create "bubbles" in space and time to launch massed waves of air attacks against this NATO force. The absence of short-range air defenses in the U.S. units, and the minimal defenses in the other NATO units, meant that many of these attacks encountered resistance only from NATO combat air patrols, which were overwhelmed by sheer numbers. The result was heavy losses to several Blue battalions and the disruption of the counterattack. This highlights a critical finding from our analysis: A successful defense of the Baltics will call for a degree of air-ground synergy whose intimacy and sophistication recalls the U.S. Army–U.S. Air Force "AirLand Battle" doctrine of the 1980s. The games have repeatedly identified the necessity for allied ground forces to maneuver within the envelope of friendly air cover and air support and for ground fires to play an integral role in the suppression campaign against Russia's advanced surface-to-air defenses.¹⁸ Against an adversary, such as Russia, that poses multidimensional threats, airpower must be employed from the outset of hostilities to enable land operations, and land power must be leveraged to enable airpower. Preventing a quick Russian victory in the Baltics would also require a NATO command structure able to plan and execute a complex, fast-moving, highly fluid air-land campaign. This is not something that can safely be left to a pickup team to "do on the day"; it requires careful preparation. The eight NATO corps that defended the inner German border during the Cold War each possessed—admittedly to different degrees in some cases—the ability to plan for and fight the forces they would command in wartime. Tactical and operational schemes of maneuver were developed and rehearsed; logistics support was planned; the reception, staging, and onward integration of reinforcing forces were laid out and, if never practiced in full, tested to an extent that lent confidence that procedures would work reasonably well when called upon.¹⁹ Traditionally, the level of planning called for in the initial phase of the defense has been the province of a U.S. corps. At the height of the Cold War, two Army corps under the operational command of 7th Army had planning responsibilities for Europe; today, none do. The Army should consider standing up a corps headquarters in Europe to take responsibility for the operational and support planning needed to prepare for and execute this complex combined arms campaign, as well as a division headquarters to orchestrate the initial tactical fight, to be joined by others as forces flow into Europe.²⁰ Follow-on operations to relieve and reinforce the initial defense and restore the prewar borders could well require at least one additional corps headquarters, which could be provided by a NATO partner or drawn from one of the Alliance's nine preexisting corps. ²¹

Russia disinformation/ethnic minorities

Russian disinformation is a constant threat

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, “Consequences for NATO,” <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/consequences-for-nato-pub-75881>)

Moscow’s NGW strategy also forces NATO to look beyond, or more precisely, below, the nuclear and conventional rungs of the escalation ladder to the problems caused by Russia’s nonkinetic operations. Deterrence and assurance are not necessarily an effective remedy against these operations as many of them take place in the civilian realm and cannot be countered by classical military means. It is, therefore, necessary for NATO to embrace a holistic strategy that doubles down on resilience measures, aimed at mitigating nonkinetic escalation risks. Moscow’s nonkinetic operations against NATO member states have essentially two goals: (1) avoiding a large-scale military conflict with the alliance while, at the same time, (2) gradually undermining member states’ internal cohesion by puzzling and exhausting them, the ultimate aim being to coerce allies into accepting unfavorable political outcomes, such as giving up on promoting the independence of the other former Soviet republics. The diverse range of Russia’s nonkinetic toolbox makes it challenging for NATO states to identify one single action, such as Russian sponsorship of anti-government groups, as sufficiently serious to demand a strong response and, then, for member states to decide what that strong response should be. Nevertheless, this form of low-level attacks in nonmilitary domains and by non-attributable or low-visibility actions can further exacerbate general tensions between NATO and Russia and could potentially create the conditions for a crisis. This problem is particularly apparent in the three Baltic states. Moscow’s disruptive propaganda and disinformation campaigns targeting the three Baltic states have been in operation for more than a decade.⁶³ All three of these states are home to ethnic Russian minorities, which constituted 25 percent of Estonia’s population, 26.9 percent of Latvia’s, and about 5.8 percent of Lithuania’s in 2011 respectively.⁶⁴ Most of these groups are fairly well integrated, and problems generally do not arise in daily life. But they continue to value their Russian roots, language, and family or business ties. Moreover, their relationship to the Baltic majorities is often fraught because of mutual historical grievances about the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states and the breakup of the Soviet Union. Almost all of these Baltic Russian minorities receive their daily information entirely through Russian state-sponsored media, which incorrectly describes the three countries as “failing states” with huge economic and political problems that are unfit to serve as proper homes for the Russians living there, not least because their Baltic majorities purportedly have stark anti-Russian feelings.⁶⁵ Since 2014, these efforts to negatively manipulate Russian minorities in the Baltics, which sometimes border on outright hate speech, have accelerated. With the arrival of the first units of the EFP, Russian propaganda increased. For example, in February 2017, a source, believed to be Russian, reported the alleged rape of a Lithuanian teenager by a group of German soldiers.⁶⁶ Even though the Lithuanian authorities quickly rebutted this untrue story, potential mistrust between the Baltic populations and the multinational NATO forces might undermine the former’s general acceptance of the latter and thus impede their defensive value for the Baltic states.

Russia is exploiting ethnopolitical tensions

Carnegie Endowment for National Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, “NATO’s Options,”
<https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/nato-s-options-pub-75883>)

Unlike the threats Russia poses in the military realm, Moscow’s intimidating NATO allies through nonkinetic operations across various civilian domains cannot be countered by traditional military means. Instead of deterrence and defense, civilian resilience measures are better tools for dealing with most of Russia’s NGW tactics. In particular, increasing the resilience of ethnic Russians in the Baltic states to Russian propaganda should become a key feature of NATO policy. The example of Ukraine, though very different compared to the three Baltic states, shows that existing ethnopolitical tensions can serve as a gateway for Russian intervention. In Ukraine, Russia exploited existing ethnopolitical problems as a pretext to resort to the use of force. Its methods should lead to two important realizations: the Kremlin cares about its image on the global scene, and it is mindful that any narrative justifying intervention should receive broad domestic support in Russia.⁹ Both realizations have implications for managing deliberate as well as inadvertent escalation pathways. Prior to an act of aggression against NATO, Moscow would have to create a pretext of a magnitude that would justify war with the world’s most powerful military alliance. While that seems unlikely, one cannot exclude the possibility that unrest in the Baltics involving minority ethnic groups could lead to inadvertent escalation if domestic pressure mounts in Moscow. For NATO, there are not many military options for mitigating these escalation risks. Deterrence is only applicable in so far as Russia decides to react to a domestic crisis in the Baltics—deliberately instigated or randomly occurring—with military pressure or the use of force.

Baltic states large Russian populations and Russia seeks to protect their compatriots

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, “RUSSIA’S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION,”
<https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

The Baltic States regained their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and were thus restored to a statehood which existed in the interwar period, between 1918 and 1940. Russia’s military presence in the Baltic States ended in 1998 with the closure of the Skrunda radar station in Latvia, the last ex-Soviet military facility to close. However, the withdrawal of Russian forces did not mean that Russia gave up its efforts to influence the foreign, security and defense policies of these countries. By not signing border demarcation agreements, for example, Moscow tried to impede the NATO and EU accession of all three Baltic States. Airspace and naval border violations have been frequent, linked to Russian air and naval traffic between mainland Russia and the Kaliningrad exclave. In addition to conventional military threats, Russia has actively used economic, financial, energy and information tools to put pressure on the Baltic States and influence their foreign, security and defense policies. Examples include Russia’s repeated information operations accusing Baltic governments of discriminating against ethnic Russians, and other attempts to instigate dissent among Russian minorities; systematic use of energy pricing to put pressure on Baltic states, above all Lithuania and Estonia; the abduction of the Estonian security officer Eston Kohver in 2014; and the regular violation of Baltic waters and

air space by Russian vessels. The Soviet era considerably changed the population of the Baltic countries. Mass deportation of local populations, combined with a coordinated influx of Russian-speaking populations, along with the policy of industrialization, considerably altered the ethnic balance, especially in Estonia and Latvia. Lithuania was affected to a lesser extent, as the country already had an existing, well-integrated Russian minority, which had lived there since the eighteenth century. In Estonia, 25 percent of the total population now define themselves as ethnic Russians, in Latvia the figure is 27 percent, but in Lithuania only 4.5 percent. Following the restoration of independence, ethnic Russians have often regarded policies and attitudes as discriminatory: they did not feel they had “emigrated” during Soviet times when they moved to the Baltic states. This perception resulted in hostile attitudes towards new realities and, in particular, to learning the languages of the countries they lived in. Meanwhile, the need to promote integration and social resilience has been acknowledged. Substantive integration programs have been set up, producing positive results, although these processes take time. In this context, it needs to be emphasized that Moscow, in accordance with its compatriot policy and the concept of the “Russian World,” aims to bind Russian speaking minorities abroad to Russia’s declared sphere of interest. It considers these minorities as an important political means of exerting influence. It is thus a concern of the Baltic states that Moscow’s narrative of “discrimination,” combined with issuing Russian passports, may be used as a political excuse for intervention, including with military forces. In past regional wars, Moscow has argued that it must “protect” Russian “compatriots” – this was the case for the war against Georgia, Moscow’s interference in Crimea, and by maintaining the armed conflict in the Donbass.

Russian minorities in Baltic states could be used as political or military tools

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, “RUSSIA’S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION,” <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

As already outlined, sizeable Russian-speaking minorities already live in the Baltic States, particularly in Estonia and Latvia. Not all are ethnic Russians, the numbers include some Ukrainians, Belarusians, Tatars and others. However, from the perspective of this study, it is the number of Russians that matters most. According to the latest national censuses, the following totals of Russians live in the three Baltic States, as compiled by Liliya Karachurina in 2019. Compared to the last Soviet census held in 1989, there was a considerable decrease in ethnic Russians in all three countries, particularly Estonia and Latvia. Nevertheless, as outlined above (chapter 2.1), the relatively large size of the Russian population means use of minorities by Russia for political and/or military purposes is still possible. Moscow might, as part of a hybrid strategy, try to stir up feelings of political, economic and social discrimination. However, recent research has suggested that, despite widespread public concerns that ethnic Russians in eastern Latvia might serve as a basis of separatism, Russian communities are in fact predominantly loyal to the Latvian state, and to membership in EU and NATO. Public support for separatism remains very low. The situation is largely similar in Estonia. While the predominantly Russian population of the eastern Estonian city of Narva, and the Ida-Viru region are not content with all Estonian state policies, they have higher salaries and better living standards than Russians over the border in Ivangorod. According to a recent survey by the Estonian Ministry of Defense, in case of an external attack, the majority (70%) of the Russian speaking minority would likely support

armed resistance against a Russian attack. This suggests a high level of loyalty to the Estonian state in case of conflict. Furthermore, a post-Crimea opinion survey on the influence of Russian compatriot policies in Estonia concluded that the territorial and political ties of Estonian Russians are quite weak, and they do not support Russia's ambition to develop strong ties between the diaspora and the homeland. Russia's objective of developing a consolidated compatriot movement able to mobilize Estonian Russians has become even more marginalized than previously. Meanwhile, on jobs and income, there is data to support the idea that segregation between the two communities still exists, and Estonian-Russians perceive inequality of opportunity in the Estonian labor market. However, ethnic distribution by occupational groups is quite balanced between Estonians and non-Estonians. Language proficiency is important for improved chances in education, employment and social position, in turn leading to higher levels of integration. In sum, as testified by Lamberto Zannier, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, considerable progress has been achieved in integrating Estonian and Latvian society, particularly in education policy, which, while ensuring preservation of minority identities, has created a common media space for all citizens (Estonia) and facilitated access to citizenship (Estonia). At the same time, according to the OSCE high commissioner, divisions along ethnic lines do persist and additional steps are required to bring majority and minority communities closer together, creating sustainable integration and resilience within Baltic societies. This is all the more relevant now, given possible analogies with Eastern Ukraine. In Donetsk in early April 2014, support for separatism was only around 30 percent. When the conflict erupted, the majority of the population passively stood by, and an active, well-organized, small minority was able to dominate events, actively controlled and supported by Russia. Hence, regardless of a general lack of public support for separatism one should continue to pay close attention to the situation and attitudes of Russian minorities there.

Russia has soft power tools in the region

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, "RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION," <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

As part of peacetime hybrid operations and information warfare, Russia seeks to achieve and maintain information influence on the Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic States, through both conventional media (primarily TV) and online media, both more popular among Baltic Russians than national language media channels in Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania. This influence is at its most spectacular in Latvia. In August 2019, the Russian language First Baltic Channel (Perviy Baltiyskiy Kanal) was the second most popular TV channel nationwide, i.e. not just among ethnic Russians, but in the population as a whole. Since Russian media often serve as a direct channel of information influence, including malign influence, the Baltic States have taken various counter-measures. These have ranged from banning certain Russian channels (such as the RTR, previously blocked in Lithuania) to expelling Russian journalists declared to be propagandists, or alternatively labelling them persona non grata. Most recently, in November 2019, Latvia decided to ban nine Russian television channels, in connection with the EU sanctions against their owner Yuri Kovalchuk. Russia tends to react to counter-measures in a highly politicized way, skillfully using arguments based on European values; for example, criticizing Baltic authorities as discriminatory, Russophobic, and acting against freedom of

speech and information. One significant phenomenon is that even if a television channel is shut down purely for economic reasons, as the Tallinn-based TTV, closed in autumn 2019, Russia's media channels tend to politicize the issue, accusing Estonian authorities of Russophobia. In terms of online soft power, Russia's disinformation and propaganda apparatus is very active in the Baltic States, both via conventional news sites and through "alternative media" channels. However, the Baltic States have been quick to react to disinformation pressure, using a wide variety of measures. Estonia set up the Russian language TV channel ETV+ so as to reach out to its Russian-speaking population; in Lithuania, a large volunteer organization was set up, called "Baltic Elves," to counter the work of Russian internet trolls. Various fact-checking and anti-disinformation initiatives have been launched in all three Baltic countries, working in close cooperation, and with Ukrainian (Stop Fake), Czech (European Values) and other organizations actively working to counter Russian disinformation. Although the threat of disinformation is still present today, awareness and resilience are far higher than they were in 2014-2015. In addition to its information apparatus, Russia has a well-developed institutional network to coordinate Moscow's policies towards Russians living abroad, including in the Baltic states. However, in reality, a considerable gap exists between Russia's official compatriots policy and its actual effectiveness. Compatriots' organizations in the Baltic states are most active in promoting Russian narratives of history. In terms of security risks, the Russian communities in Estonia and Latvia are most vulnerable to Moscow's narratives on "violation of minority rights," while the problem is much less acute in Lithuania. However, it is safe to say that Moscow's possible use of Russian minorities as a pretext for violating the sovereignty of the Baltic countries depends on Russia's future strategic interests, developments and constellations, not on the perceived or claimed level of discrimination. In other words, Moscow arguing about the Russian minorities in the Baltics is far more a policy tool than an inherent, value-based policy drive. When it comes to actual military implications, the possible use of civilian crowds – ethnic Russians mobilized by soft power and information tools and/or subversive actions – for tactical and operational purposes deserves closer research attention.

Belarus

Russia has a valuable ally in Belarus

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, "RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION," <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

When assessing Russia's policies towards the Baltic States, we must bear in mind the role and place of Belarus, for a number of reasons. Besides its obvious geographical location, Belarus is a close political and military ally of Russia, highly dependent on Moscow in economic and energy security terms. However, from the beginning of the Ukraine crisis in 2014 until the August 2020 presidential elections, Minsk had been conducting a careful, increasingly multi-vectoral foreign policy, trying to balance interests between Russia and the West, hoping to decrease its dependence on Moscow, preventing a Ukraine-type scenario resulting in the loss of Belarusian sovereignty. However, the 9 August 2020 presidential elections were massively rigged, and were followed by an unprecedented wave of demonstrations. The regime reacted with widespread, brutal crackdowns: thousands were arrested and tortured by the security forces; several people have been killed by the police. Despite widespread protests, the Lukashenko regime has remained relatively stable. In this, significant political, informational, policing and security-related support from Russia has played a decisive role. In short, it was Russia that prevented the collapse of the Lukashenko system. However, while the regime has managed to prevail, its legitimacy both at home and abroad has been permanently damaged. Neither the European Union nor the United States have recognized the presidential election results; instead, a new wave of sanctions has been imposed on those responsible for repression. Meanwhile, anti-Lukashenko protests in Belarus have continued, despite brutal police reaction and worsening weather conditions. The post-election situation put an abrupt end to Belarusian foreign policy's maneuvering between East and West: Minsk is now more dependent on Russia than ever before. Hence, properly assessing Russia's policy options and room for maneuver vis-à-vis the Baltic States, particularly Lithuania, requires evaluating Belarus's role in the equation.

Belarus is increasingly falling under Russian influence

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, "RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION," <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

Belarus was a founding member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the associated Customs Union, which later became the Eurasian Economic Union. In addition to these relations, the two countries have a special bilateral integration structure, the so-called Union State. The Union State was established in 1999, originally aimed at creating supra-national integration of Russia and Belarus. It has been reported that the president of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, who came to power in 1994, originally hoped to dominate this bilateral integration against the aging, sick Russian president Boris Yeltsin. However, following the emergence of Vladimir Putin, integration enthusiasm in Minsk gradually decreased, particularly since Putin proposed the incorporation of Belarus into Russia in 2002. Since then, development of the Union State has largely stagnated. On the one hand, basic institutional structures have

been set up and are functioning: there is a joint budget, and regular meetings of both presidents, governments and parliaments. On the other hand, the Union State never reached true supra-nationality, but has always remained at an intergovernmental level. Original plans to create a joint constitution, a common currency, genuine customs-free trade, a joint army and several common structures were never realized. The main reason for this is the reluctance of Belarusian elites, including the president, to make concessions on sovereignty. This is in keeping with the observation that authoritarian countries find it harder to delegate competences to supranational bodies, since it would constrain their own autonomy and power in some respect. In addition to the general phenomenon, the post-2014 political context has made Belarus even less willing to give up sovereignty: events in Ukraine have demonstrated that Russia is willing and able to modify borders by force if its geopolitical interests demand, and if Moscow thinks it can manage the risks. Under these circumstances, it is highly unlikely that Belarus would agree to any real implementation of integration measures prescribed in the 1999 Union State Treaty, especially while Lukashenko is in power. However, this earlier calculus has been fundamentally transformed by the events of August 2020. Lukashenko's domestic legitimacy has been shaken and his Western contacts largely severed. To remain in power for even a while longer, Lukashenko has little other choice than to offer Russia more and more concessions: political, economic and energy-related. Hence, it is likely that Russia will keep gradually limiting Belarus' decision-making autonomy in political, military and economic matters, but without constraining its formal sovereignty. In particular, Moscow seems likely to use the Union State project as a political tool and the strong dependence of Minsk on Russian economic subsidies as a form of direct leverage. In this way, Moscow could enjoy the benefits of closely influencing (sometimes controlling) the domestic, foreign, security and defense policies of Belarus, increasing its own security while keeping related costs limited to economic subsidies.

Belarus is an integral part of Russia's military strategy

Brauß and Rácz 2021 (Heinrich Brauß and Dr. András Rácz, January 7 2021, DGAP report, "RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ACTIONS IN THE BALTIC REGION," <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>)

Notwithstanding the above analysis, Belarus has been a close military ally of Russia ever since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Although the early 1990s saw was brief period when neutrality was considered as a future security policy option, from 1994 on President Lukashenko re-oriented Minsk to a pro-Russian security and defense policy course. Belarus military doctrine explicitly names military cooperation with Russia as the primary guarantor of the security and defense of the country. Military cooperation between the two countries has been close ever since 1991. Russia is the main supplier of the military industry of Belarus, and its main market. Conversely, Belarus produces a number of weapons components which Russia cannot manufacture alone. In addition, Russia provides general staff level military education for the Belarusian military, since Minsk lacks the necessary capabilities. Annually, more than 400 Belarusian officers study at Russian military higher education institutions, and military-to-military ties are traditionally cordial. Russia has two pieces of crucial military infrastructure (voennyi obyekt) on Belarusian soil:: a long-range radar, and a naval signal transmission station

used to communicate with Russia's submarines. For several years, Moscow has been pushing Minsk to host a Russian military base (voennaya baza); however, the project was so far not realized due to the reluctance of the Belarusian leadership to permanently base Russian fighting forces in the country. Nevertheless, Russia's air forces are allowed to use the military airports in Belarus; the only restriction being that they are not authorized to spend more than 24 hours on Belarusian territory. However, it is telling that when plans were made public for the "Fort Trump" base in Poland, i.e. the ongoing deployment of a fully-fledged U.S. army division, Belarusian officials were quick to emphasize that Belarus would need to reconsider its earlier position on not hosting a Russian military base. The territory and armed forces of Belarus are integral parts of Russia's A2AD capabilities. This applies particularly to the Belarus air defense system, which functions more or less in complete integration with the Russian one, officially within the framework of the Union State. In 2015, Belarus received at least four S-300 air defense missile systems from Russia, followed by two batteries of S-400s in 2016, in addition to at least five (as of December 2018) Tor-M2 short-range air defense batteries. These air defense systems make Belarus an important contributor to Russia's A2AD capabilities, which are also able to cover parts of the Baltic States. To a lesser extent the same applies to artillery and surface-to-surface missiles, since Belarus employs a large number of ex-Soviet and Russian MLRS systems, as well as Scud and Tochka-U missiles. Most recently, in cooperation with China, Belarus developed a new 300 mm MLRS system, the Polonez, with a confirmed range of over 200 kilometers. It is safe to assume that Belarusian artillery alone would be able to striking the Suvalki gap and thus impede military movements of NATO forces. In addition to these capabilities, Belarus has long been trying to obtain Iskander surface-to-surface missiles from Russia, which would further strengthen Minsk's role as an A2AD asset for Moscow. Close military ties are also manifested in joint military exercises. The Zapad 2009 military exercise modelled an uprising of the Polish minority in Belarus, jointly suppressed by Russian and Belarusian military forces, culminating in a Russian nuclear strike on Warsaw. The Zapad 2013 scenario envisaged that "Baltic terrorists" (de facto meaning NATO forces) attacked Belarus. A counter-attack of joint Russian-Belarusian forces against advancing enemy (again NATO) forces was a key component of the Zapad 2017 exercise. In addition to Zapad exercises, there are other regular bilateral Russian-Belarusian military exercises, such as the biannual Union Shield series. The examples of Zapad and Union Shield exercises demonstrate that conducting operations in and across the territory of Belarus is an integral part of Russian military planning. Taking these factors into account, as well as Minsk's dependence on Moscow, now greater than it has ever been, it is highly unlikely that Belarusian forces would put up any meaningful resistance against Russia in case of a NATO-Russia military confrontation in the Baltic region. On the contrary, it is safe to assume that Russian forces would swiftly move into Belarusian territory and use it for its own strategic, operational and tactical purposes, particularly moving in the direction of Kaliningrad. It is also realistic to expect that the dominant majority of Belarusian forces would actively cooperate with Russian forces, particularly in coordinating their operations with the use of Russian A2AD assets. In addition to all this, Moscow may well try to use the weakened positions of the Lukashenko regime after August 2020 to again bring up the question of a permanent Russian military base in Belarus. The next strategic military exercise of the Zapad series will take place in the autumn of 2021. The initial outline of the exercise has already been discussed by the Russian and Belarussian ministries of defense. Details of the Zapad-2021

exercise will probably reveal the extent to which Belarus can manage to preserve its sovereignty in terms of military security, and also the role Belarus might play in Russia's military planning in case of a hypothetical NATO-Russia confrontation in the Baltic region.

Nuke war

Non-military measures won't stop nuclear escalation

Carnegie Endowment for National Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, "NATO's Options," <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/nato-s-options-pub-75883>)

Neither deterrence and assurance nor enhanced resilience is applicable to preventing accidental escalation. For this task, NATO's goal of achieving security cooperatively with Moscow comes into play. Jointly reducing various risks that stem from limited transparency and potential military incidents calls for agreed-upon rules and good communications in crisis situations. Beyond such immediate risk-reduction measures, more ambitious CSBMs and arms control measures would be more challenging to attain. Some, such as modernizing the OSCE's Vienna Document, might be achievable even in the current environment. Others—such as limitations on conventional weaponry—would be tougher sells. Much will depend on NATO's ability to reach a robust consensus on these matters. In parallel to implementing agreed-upon measures to strengthen deterrence and assurance, NATO should continue to engage Moscow on enhancing communication in the event of an accidental crisis. Together, these two efforts could prepare the groundwork for NATO to present concrete CSBMs and conventional arms control arrangements to Moscow. The upside of this approach would be to reconcile the positions of alliance members that are skeptical of a stronger military response to Russia with those skeptical of more cooperation. There are three chief ways NATO could seek to reduce the most pressing risks of accidental escalation. First, NATO should aim to re-establish military-to-military crisis communications channels with the Russian General Staff at the working level. NATO holds some sporadic meetings of the NATO-Russia Council, which is a useful tool for general political dialogue, but might not be sufficient in the event of a crisis because the council does not provide the necessary military-to-military communications channels. Second, initial talks about avoiding accidental escalation should aim at commonly agreed-upon and adhered-to rules for preventing accidents in the busy civilian and military airspace over the Baltic Sea. More ambitiously, Washington and Moscow should make continuous use of the readily available bilateral U.S.-Russian Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities. In addition, NATO should encourage Poland and the three Baltic states to seek to conclude individual agreements with Russia similar to the Agreement on the Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas. Third, reconvening NATO-Russian talks about military strategy and nuclear doctrine, which had been ongoing prior to Russia's annexation of Crimea, could help dispel misperceptions and thus avoid inadvertent escalation. Such discussions would be particularly important since the strategic nuclear dialogue between Washington and Moscow effectively petered out after the New START entered into force in 2011 (though efforts to revive the dialogue are under way). NATO could use such talks to emphasize its resolve and address Russia's supposed nonlinear approach to the threat or use of nuclear weapons. Those short-term options are unlikely to spark much contention within NATO because they would not undermine deterrence, assurance, or alliance unity. However, implementing them in the current political environment would be difficult because Russia reaps benefits from appearing unpredictable. Going beyond these initial measures to address the risk of accidental escalation and engaging Russia on more far-reaching CSBMs and arms control measures would be even more difficult. On this front, NATO should start to put more intellectual effort into identifying what specific measures would increase allies'

security. First, allies' concerns about large-scale Russian exercises close to NATO territory highlight a lack of transparency and predictability that could be mitigated by mutually agreed-upon CSBMs, such as an updated version of the OSCE's Vienna Document addressing snap exercises, as well as large ones broken down into multiple components. Second, mitigating the risks that stem from the numerical imbalance in regional conventional forces should be possible if the two sides can devise limitations on heavy conventional weaponry. The worst-case scenario for NATO would be a Russian attack against one of the alliance's militarily weak eastern members. For such an attack to be successful, Russia would have to use its tanks, armored vehicles, aircraft, and helicopters. Enabling technologies such as cruise missiles, command and control assets, and air defense systems- are crucial for such operations, but they cannot seize and hold enemy territory. This reality points to the continued utility of an arms control arrangement limiting states' ability to move boots on the ground. As the Cold War ended, NATO and the Warsaw Pact agreed to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), which reduced and limited five specified types of conventional military land and air equipment in designated geographical zones. In 2007, Moscow suspended the CFE Treaty in reaction to NATO making the ratification of an Adapted CFE Treaty conditional on Russia's withdrawing remaining weapons and personnel from secessionist regions in Georgia and Moldova.¹⁷ Even though the treaty is de facto still in place, without Russia's participation it has lost much of its utility. Still, particularly in today's tense environment, a CFE-type arrangement could increase security on NATO's eastern flank. Since many of the current military tensions emanate from the Baltic Sea, perhaps a naval arms control component could be added, though addressing rapid naval military movements could prove difficult. NATO should be mindful, too, of the critics of a conventional arms control approach. Critics from the Baltics, in particular, voice concerns that regional limitations on conventional forces, even if reciprocal, would solidify the notion of an alliance with different zones of security, thus undermining assurance and unity.¹⁸ While this perception certainly has its merits, NATO allies should convince the Baltic states that more security can be built around increased deterrence and assurance, ideally coupled with reciprocal arms control arrangements.

Increase infrastructure

Infrastructure should come as a part of increasing defense commitments

Shlapak and Johnson 2016 (David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, 2016, RAND corporation, “Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank,” https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html)

For more than 40 years, NATO’s member states made enormous investments to deter a potential Soviet attack on Western Europe. Today, the West confronts a Russia that has violently disrupted the post–Cold War European security order. Led by a man who has characterized the fall of the Soviet Union as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, Russia has at the very least put on hold the vision of a “Europe whole and free.” To the extent that Moscow believes that NATO poses a threat to its ability to exercise necessary influence along its periphery, the presence of the Baltic NATO members along its borders may well seem unacceptable.²² Since the early 1990s, the United States and its NATO partners have shaped their forces based on the belief that Europe had become an exporter of security, and for more than two decades that assumption held true. Unfortunately, the usually unspoken accompanying assumption—that the West would see any disruption to that status quo coming far enough in advance to reposition itself to meet any challenge that might emerge—appears to have missed the mark. Instead, Russia’s aggressiveness and hostility have caught NATO still resetting itself in a direction that is making it less prepared to deal with Moscow’s behavior. The first step to restoring a more-robust deterrent is probably to stop chipping away at the one that exists. If NATO wishes to position itself to honor its collective security commitment to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, its members should first hit the pause button on further steps that reduce its ability to do so. While some ongoing actions may be too far advanced to stop, the United Kingdom and the United States should evaluate whether additional withdrawals of forces from Germany are wise, given the changed circumstances. All members should reassess their force structures and postures with an eye toward determining whether there are affordable near-term actions that can be taken that could increase the Alliance’s capability to respond to a threat to the Baltics and thereby strengthen deterrence of such a threat. These measures need not be limited to strictly military ones. For example, one challenge NATO would face in the event of a Baltic crisis would be moving heavy equipment and supplies from storehouses and ports in Western Europe east to Poland and beyond. German and Polish transportation authorities could conduct a systematic assessment of the adequacy of rail and road infrastructure and rolling stock to support the swift and organized movement of multiple brigades and many thousands of tons of materiel on short notice. Substantial investments may be necessary to facilitate these flows, investments that—because they also benefit the civilian economy— may prove more politically palatable than direct expenditures on troops and weapons. But troops and weapons are also needed, and it verges on disingenuous for a group of nations as wealthy as NATO to plead poverty as an excuse for not making the marginal investments necessary to field a force adequate at the very least to prevent the disaster of a Russian coup de main.

More commitment is necessary to resolve infrastructure issues

Blanchford 2020 (Kevin Blanchford, February 7 2020, Can NATO and The EU Really Defend the Baltic States Against Russia? National Interest, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/can-nato-and-eu-really-defend-baltic-states-against-russia-121711>)

The Defender Exercise 2020 will be one of the biggest military exercises since the end of the Cold War. The exercise will take place in May and June of this year and will occur across the regions of Germany, Poland, and the Baltic States. Despite President Trump's outspoken criticism of European allies, it will also be one of the largest deployments of U.S. troops to Europe in twenty-five years. The intention of the exercise is to demonstrate U.S. resolve to defend its allies and to show the deterrent ability of NATO. It will play an important part in signaling alliance commitment, testing readiness, and improving interoperability. However, at the political level, this exercise may be misguided. Such a large exercise on Russia's borders risks both intentional and unintended escalation, perhaps through unconventional means, as was seen with Russia's reaction to previous military exercises by blocking GPS location signals in the region. It also provides only a short term response to deeper military challenges in the Baltic region. Primarily, the challenge facing NATO is dealing with the possibility of Russia using the Baltics as a way to test the credibility of the NATO alliance. The Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia currently rely on NATO's enhanced forward presence and air policing missions to deter Russian aggression. But this provides only short term reassurance to the region and overlooks the lessons of the Cold War in which West Germany played a vital role in the credibility of NATO's deterrence posture. The reluctance of Germany to think seriously about the military security of Europe is, therefore, becoming a hindrance to NATO's deterrence capabilities. Germany has repeatedly emphasized its aversion to militarism in recent years and its military has faced numerous bouts of austerity. But this reluctance to be seen as a military power overlooks the role of the West German Bundeswehr which acted as the first line of NATO's defense in the Cold War. The history of the Cold War provides clues to how deterrence could be increased in the Baltic region today. The defense and deterrence capability of West Germany revolved not just around the nuclear deterrent, but on the ability of the United States and its allies to deploy forces quickly. This related to the logistic capabilities to move forces quickly to the border with East Germany. An important part of NATO strategy therefore relied on the West German autobahns as a way to move both goods and people. Today, the Baltic region lacks any meaningful infrastructure in which reinforcements could be moved quickly to the region. Train lines are outdated and travel between the Baltics to Poland or further to Germany is painstakingly slow. The Baltic states also do not have any significant capabilities to host allied forces in large scale numbers, particularly as access to the area in a conflict scenario would be limited due to Russian air superiority and anti-access, area-denial capabilities. The large placement of U.S. forces in this sensitive area would no doubt invite reprisals and escalation from Russia. But showing the capabilities to quickly respond to a crisis by having the capacity to move resources to the region would enhance NATO's deterrence in the long term. NATO should therefore consider developing its forces in Germany and even Poland, but with the added caveat of being able to move these forces quickly to where they are needed in the Baltics. The lack of infrastructure across the Baltic region, therefore, creates two main problems. Firstly, it limits NATO's credibility to respond to a crisis on the border with Russia. Secondly,

infrastructure serves a dual purpose in both war and peacetime. The lack of European investment and interest in the region creates opportunities for Russia to undermine the societies of the three Baltic nations. This shows the primary challenge facing NATO in European defense. The European Union needs to do more to show its commitment to the East. Continual expansion eastwards has not had the de-securitizing effect once expected. The lack of German commitment and Brussel's interest in the region is also effecting NATO's ability to defend the Baltics.

Con Evidence

NATO slow reaction time

NATO troops take too long to deploy

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, “Consequences for NATO,” <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/consequences-for-nato-pub-75881>)

NATO force deployments to Eastern Europe—the EFP in particular—are intended to increase pressure on NATO members to respond more forcefully in the event of combat. The logic behind this strategy is that involving NATO forces from a variety of nations in a conflict against Russia—and hence giving them a direct stake in the outcome—would help minimize pressure within the alliance to simply cede to Russia any territory it may take, thus strengthening deterrence and preventing deliberate Russian escalation. However, the benefits of this multinational approach might be significantly overstated. As some Western analysts have pointed out, a limited, targeted Russian attack could implicate only a small subset of the nations that contribute to the EFP.¹³ If Russia were to solely attack, say, Latvia (which has about 5,300 active national personnel), its forces would face about 1,100 additional soldiers from Albania, Canada, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, and Spain—but Russia would not face British, French, German, or U.S. forces.¹⁴ In fact, given that the EFP base in Latvia is located in Ādaži, more than 200 kilometers from the Latvian-Russian border, even the Latvian EFP battlegroup would not necessarily be involved in the initial stages of combat if Russia were to attack and rapidly seize only a small part of eastern Latvia. Moreover, Russia has repeatedly shown that it can muster a force of up to 100,000 personnel in its Western Military District on relatively short notice.¹⁵ The small EFP force that would line up against them would essentially constitute a trip wire that could neither halt nor push back a serious Russian intervention. The main purpose of the EFP personnel would be to ensure that as many NATO allies as possible would be involved in combat, or to put it more bluntly, would die.¹⁶ The grim logic of this arrangement is that once the trip wire is pulled, NATO would be forced to retake the Baltic states if it were to not accept (temporary) defeat at Russia’s hands. In the event of a crisis or combat, the EFP could, according to current plans, receive two waves of reinforcements. The first to arrive would be NATO’s Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF)—also known as the Spearhead Force—which consists of, at most, 13,000 personnel. The Spearhead is the most rapidly deployable part of the Enhanced NATO Response Force (eNRF) the rest of which would follow later. At most, the complete eNRF consists of 40,000 personnel (including the Spearhead).¹⁷ Assembling, moving, and deploying those forces would take time. NATO estimates that it would take less than seven days to deploy the Spearhead.¹⁸ Little is known publicly about the readiness of the rest of the eNRF.¹⁹ Some experts believe that “between 30 and 45 days” would be needed “from notice to movement” — a timeline that does not include actual deployment.²⁰ How long it would take European allies to muster additional credible forces for a potential third wave, given the atrophied state of some European allies’ forces, is even less clear.²¹ One study concluded that even British, French, or German forces would have a hard time providing a combat-ready heavy brigade at short notice.²²

NATO’s slow reaction time could create inadvertent escalation

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, “Consequences for NATO,” <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/consequences-for-nato-pub-75881>)

Of course, in the event of a crisis, it would be possible for individual NATO states, most notably the United States, to bypass NATO's political command structure and intervene independently ahead of a NATO decision.²³ However, doing so would come at the political price of rendering NATO's collective decisionmaking in the North Atlantic Council (NAC) obsolete. Moreover, given the current U.S. administration's ambiguous commitment to Article V, Washington's willingness to intervene independently is questionable. In any case, all military crisis planning ultimately depends on NATO allies politically agreeing to use force to counter a potential Russian attack. While the decision to enter war with Russia would certainly not be an easy one, it would require a unanimous vote by the twenty-nine members of the NAC.²⁴ NATO's long reaction times create another problem—the risk of inadvertent escalation. In the event that Russia threatened a conventional attack, NATO decisionmakers would be under potentially enormous pressure to ready the Spearhead and perhaps also the eNRF as early as possible to prevent deliberate escalation. But Moscow could misinterpret these actions as an imminent threat, leading Russia to rapidly escalate in response.²⁵ NATO could try to communicate the purposes behind its actions to Russia, but doing so persuasively could be difficult.

NATO ineffective/criticisms of NATO

The geography of the Baltics isn't conducive to NATO operations

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, "Consequences for NATO," <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/consequences-for-nato-pub-75881>)

To make matters worse, the geography of the Baltics would not be conducive to NATO operations. Russia enjoys considerable strategic depth in its vast Western Military District and has a well-integrated railroad system to reinforce troops quickly in the event of a conflict. By contrast, NATO allies would have to fly or ship in reinforcements of personnel and military equipment—a much slower process.²⁶ NATO has decided against pre-positioning equipment in the Baltic states; much U.S. equipment is, for example, based 1,500 kilometers away in Germany. Reinforcing by land would entail multiple challenges, ranging from NATO's atrophied logistics or missing railway links in Eastern Europe to Russia's abilities to hold NATO's transportation nodes at risk. Particularly the latter represents a serious problem for NATO. The flow of NATO's reinforcements—by air, sea, and land routes—could be disrupted by Russia's substantial modern anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, which are centered in the Kaliningrad exclave and around Saint Petersburg. These capabilities include conventional and dual-capable guided missiles, anti-ship weapons, air defense systems, and several layers of modern radar.²⁷ If accusations that Russia has violated the INF Treaty are correct, then Moscow might well also possess dual-capable intermediate-range missiles that could be used to target key transport nodes and pre-positioned equipment deep in Western Europe. Taken together, the current EFP configuration has loopholes that might provide Russia with the opportunity for a military fait accompli, effectively taking a small part of Latvia. This increases the risk of deliberate escalation. Without the EFP directly involved in early combat, NATO members might find it hard to agree on immediate military counteractions. If Russia were to only threaten a conventional attack, the risk of inadvertent escalation might increase once NATO decides to deploy additional forces to the Baltics. Russia might simply misread NATO's defensive move as offensive. Last but not least, in any crisis or open conflict with Russia, NATO would face serious but not insurmountable obstacles reinforcing its troops.

NATO unnecessarily increases tensions

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, "Consequences for NATO," <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/consequences-for-nato-pub-75881>)

These views are at odds with those of other NATO allies who have warned the alliance of unnecessarily increasing tensions with Russia by going beyond current deployments. Germany and France, in particular, seem to believe that the EFP is sufficient and that further military deployments are not an urgent matter.³² Conscious of cost considerations, they point to allies' combined military and economic superiority and see the Russian conventional edge in the Baltics as only one side of the equation. After all, on the other hand, NATO states currently have 3.2 million personnel in their collective militaries, compared to 830,000 active Russian servicemen; moreover, the United States maintains, by far, the world's largest and most powerful armed forces. In the words of the former head of Poland's National Security Bureau, Army General Stanisław Koziej, "NATO is the most powerful military alliance in the world and

has the largest military potential at its disposal, the deterrence power of which discourages any potential adversary from confrontation.”³³ The allies that take this position receive support from NATO’s Southern European members, who would instead like to see greater attention focused on North Africa and the Middle East to counter threats such as mass migration and international terrorism.³⁴ Further arguments against a more muscular NATO policy in Eastern Europe include recognition of Russia’s legitimate interest in securing Kaliningrad (which might be hard for Moscow to defend in a war with NATO³⁵) and NATO’s ability to hold Russian A2/AD assets at risk, using assets that include dozens of advanced stealthy air-launched cruise missiles recently acquired by Poland.³⁶ According to the U.S. chief of naval operations, Admiral John Richardson, “The reality is that we can fight from within these defended [A2/AD] areas and if needed, we will.”³⁷

NATO creates cyclical harms

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, “Consequences for NATO,” <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/consequences-for-nato-pub-75881>)

Proponents of a more cautious approach worry that NATO and Russia are entering a self-reinforcing cycle of mutual insecurity, with each side (mis)interpreting the actions of the other as potentially offensive in nature. They argue that the instability of an uncontrolled arms race, driven by a desire for more security, further increases general tensions with Russia and could ultimately lead to escalation.³⁸ Germany, in particular, has spearheaded calls for NATO-Russian talks on confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) and arms control, building on NATO’s consensus decision at the 2014 Wales Summit to renew dialogue with Russia over the long term.³⁹ Berlin argues that NATO should not forget that goal. Germany sees arms control measures for the wider Baltic region—such as mutual force limitations in the region and more transparency regarding large as well as snap Russian exercises—as useful tools for enhancing crisis stability and avoiding a renewed arms race.⁴⁰ While recognizing Moscow’s aggressive policies over the last few years, proponents of arms control want to see an ongoing NATO commitment to hold on to the last remaining vestiges of the cooperative security regime with Russia. They fear that going beyond NATO’s current deterrence and assurance measures in the Baltic states and Poland could overload the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997, in which NATO pledged not to permanently station additional “substantial combat forces” on the territories of those states.⁴¹ NATO reiterated this pledge at the Warsaw Summit.⁴²

NATO faces many criticisms

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The intra-alliance debate over nuclear weapons is similar to the one over conventional forces. Critics who worry that NATO is doing too little perceive Russia as having more, and more readily available, capabilities, as well as, perhaps, greater resolve to escalate to nuclear use. They worry that NATO’s resolve to use nuclear weapons is undermined by powerful domestic opposition to nuclear arms in key member states and by the fact that NATO’s combined conventional forces are still superior to Russia’s (which is to say there might be no actual need for NATO to use its nuclear weapons).⁴⁷ Some allies also criticize NATO for not making meaningful attempts to explain to their publics why nuclear arms continue to matter.⁴⁸ The result of this lack of public

discussion, they claim, is that NATO's forward-deployed nuclear weapons are typically kept in such a way that they are weeks away from being ready to use.⁴⁹ As a result, critics charge NATO with being unprepared for nuclear use. Other points of criticism abound as well. For instance, NATO exercises do not practice the transition from conventional to nuclear warfare, as Russian exercises do. Another issue is that a minority of experts also views NATO's numerical nuclear inferiority in Europe as problematic and is concerned that the existing imbalance will be further tipped in Russia's favor if Moscow really is producing and deploying weapons in violation of the INF Treaty.⁵⁰ Polish experts, in particular, have expressed additional concerns about the possibility of Russia secretly moving nuclear warheads for short-range missiles into Kaliningrad.⁵¹ Especially in light of Moscow's alleged doctrine of escalate-to-deescalate, these critics believe that NATO would be left without an appropriate response if Russia were to escalate to nuclear use or even if it just threatened nuclear use following an attack on NATO territory.⁵² As a result, they worry that NATO's nuclear deterrent might not be sufficiently credible to prevent deliberate Russian escalation. Against this backdrop, the new 2018 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) argues that to "credibly deter Russian nuclear or non-nuclear strategic attacks . . . the President must have a range of limited and graduated options, including a variety of delivery systems and explosive yields."⁵³ Such capabilities, the drafters of the NPR argue, would "pose insurmountable difficulties to any Russian strategy of aggression against the United States, its allies, or partners and ensure the credible prospect of unacceptably dire costs to the Russian leadership if it were to choose aggression."⁵⁴ In concrete terms, the NPR recommends new sea-based nuclear options, including low-yield nuclear warheads, designed to introduce additional tailored nuclear responses. Those proposals are most likely welcome in Eastern Europe, and particularly in Poland, where some analysts and officials have debated the option of making Polish F-16 fighter jets nuclear-capable to support NATO's nuclear missions.⁵⁵

We don't need to do more

NATO's nuclear profile is already increasing – more escalation isn't necessary
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, "Consequences for NATO," <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/consequences-for-nato-pub-75881>)

Those who oppose efforts to strengthen NATO's nuclear profile make a strong case that doing so would risk serious disunity because of the strong public opposition to nuclear weapons in many European NATO states. In response to the criticism that NATO lacks the capabilities necessary for deterrence, they point out that NATO is already tailoring its deterrent capability. In particular, the U.S. B-61s have a so-called dial-a-yield functionality that reportedly permits them to produce a yield as low as 0.3 kilotons or as high as 170 kilotons.⁵⁶ Moreover, prior to the new NPR, Washington was already in the process of enhancing NATO's nuclear deterrence capabilities. Starting in 2022, Washington will field a modernized version of the B-61 with improved accuracy and (again) adjustable yields.⁵⁷ In addition, the new U.S. administration is proceeding with plans to acquire between 1,000 and 1,100 new air-launched nuclear-armed cruise missiles that, in the event of a crisis, could be deployed to Europe along with the necessary U.S. aircraft.⁵⁸ Washington has also begun to reinsert a nuclear presence into some NATO exercises since the annexation of Crimea—including two exercises in the Baltic region—with the participation of nuclear-capable U.S. B-52 bombers.⁵⁹

Pro won't happen

Nuclear measures won't be adopted by NATO – this means the pro won't happen

Carnegie Endowment for National Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, "NATO's Options," <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/nato-s-options-pub-75883>)

None of these nuclear measures would have any realistic chance of being adopted by NATO at the moment. Opposition by countries including Germany, France, and others to such far-reaching measures would simply be too strong. Pushing back against them would risk alliance unity. Moreover, some of those measures could help to increase—instead of decrease—the risk of escalation if, for instance, Russia were to fly attacks against newly certified dual-capable aircraft deployed close to Russian territory in the early stages of a war. Extending sharing arrangements to eastern members could also lead Russia to reciprocate, perhaps by producing and deploying new tactical nuclear weapons. These actions could spark a new nuclear arms race in Europe, which would contribute to increased general tensions and make inadvertent escalation more likely.

Political capital

Deterrence by denial could expend valuable political capital

Carnegie Endowment for National Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, “NATO’s Options,” <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/nato-s-options-pub-75883>)

If NATO wants to deny Russia the ability to successfully attack one or more Baltic states, it has little choice but to deploy forces on a much larger scale than it currently does. Such forces could be deployed gradually to avoid giving Russia a casus belli and to make such deployments more palatable to skeptical NATO members. The 2017 RAND study proposed deployments of around 35,000 personnel, with an additional reinforcement capability of up to about 70,000 personnel;1 this would certainly prevent a Russian military fait accompli and force Moscow to fight a bloody and drawn-out conventional war, should it attack. These deployments would also, perhaps, eliminate most of the difficulties—and some of the resulting escalation pathways—that stem from the alliance’s current need to reinforce troops rapidly and on a large scale in a crisis. In addition, these troop deployments would raise the costs to Moscow of deliberately forcing a military crisis with NATO.

While such measures might mitigate the short-term risk of deliberate Russian escalation, they would create a number of severe political trade-offs. First, a deterrence-by-denial approach would risk overstretching the delicate political consensus among NATO members about conventional deterrence and assurance. A number of member states, perhaps led by Germany and France, would not support such a policy and would seek to block it. Even more importantly, perhaps, not even the Baltic states are supportive of such a maximalist approach. While many Baltic officials and experts would like to see greater U.S. military engagement in the region, some of them are highly skeptical of the assumptions underlying the RAND war games and think that they are too pessimistic about Baltic defenses. While they would like to see a strong, unified allied response to the growing threat from Russia, they also recognize the need to avoid unnecessarily escalating general tensions with Russia.2 Also, against the background of often contentious debates within NATO about financial and military burden sharing, it would not be clear at all who would provide the necessary funds and forces for such a large military footprint. Neither the United States nor most other allies currently seem to be both willing and capable.

There are options that maintain alliance unity

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Another necessary adjustment, if not already under way, would be to forge a clear political understanding within NATO of its role pertaining to possible domestic protests that Russia may foment in the three Baltic states. In a similar vein, NATO should seek to avoid any overlapping or even conflicting chains of command for the EFP and consider the additional option of devising harmonized rules of engagement before its Graduated Response Plan comes into play. Beyond the EFP, NATO should seek greater clarity internally about what military or perhaps even political events would trigger deployment of the Spearhead Force and the eNRF. This process should result in streamlined political and military decisionmaking in the event of a crisis. NATO has already started to rehearse its crisis decisionmaking,3 but that is not the same as

streamlining necessary processes. Perhaps allies should determine, in advance, which general contingencies will trigger reinforcement so that, in times of crisis, the North Atlantic Council can act swiftly. Furthermore, NATO needs to enhance its capabilities to reinforce forward-deployed forces given its atrophied logistics capabilities in Europe as well as Russia's A2/AD capabilities. NATO has already begun to review and revise its logistics approach so as to move forces faster in the event of a crisis.⁴ But allies should also discuss strengthening air defenses aimed at protecting NATO's vital transportation and logistics nodes in Western Europe as well as strengthening Baltic airspace. None of those options would be entirely uncontroversial within the alliance. They would, however, almost certainly be much less contentious than adopting a deterrence-by-denial approach and would help strengthen assurance of the alliance's eastern members. It is also less likely that Russia would (mis)perceive such measures as escalatory. Alliance unity will be much harder to maintain when it comes to NATO's nuclear deterrent, given the aforementioned ambiguities in NATO's current approach for political reasons. One way to convince Russia of NATO's resolve and readiness would be, perhaps, to tighten the link between NATO's conventional and nuclear forces by integrating both elements in exercises—as NATO did during the Cold War. Another option would be to increase the readiness levels of nuclear forces in Europe (none of which could currently be made ready for use in less than a few weeks). An even more provocative step would be for NATO to extend its sharing arrangements to select eastern members, such as Poland, by allowing them to certify national aircraft for nuclear weapon delivery, and/or by deploying B-61 gravity bombs to their territories.

Escalated NATO responses would necessitate treaty violations

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As for NATO's response to alleged Russian INF Treaty violations, the alliance could opt to deploy its own ground-launched, medium- or intermediate-range cruise missiles if Washington were willing to produce and provide them and if European allies agreed to host them. In so doing, NATO could impose significant costs on Moscow, which despite its efforts to enhance its precision-strike capabilities, seemed mindful, at least in the past, of the likely economic and security consequences of a new arms race.⁷ This policy would, however, mean abrogating the INF Treaty. Given the strong opposition to doing so in most of Western Europe, there would be immense political costs and risks of undermining NATO unity. Allies could therefore explore alternative options compliant with the INF Treaty, such as limited forward deployments of conventional cruise missiles on U.S. bombers and ships in Western Europe, as well as enhanced cruise missile defenses at NATO's vital transportation nodes. In parallel, NATO and non-NATO members should increase diplomatic pressure on Moscow.⁸ In doing so, allies should seek to bring additional countries from Asia, also directly affected by Moscow's alleged violations, to voice their discomfort vis-à-vis the Kremlin.

Resilience measures

Resilience measures, different from defense commitments, solve ethnic tensions

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A more effective approach would be to reduce the initial risk of domestic unrest as much as possible. Resilience measures could be an important way to help make minorities more immune to nonkinetic Russian operations, such as propaganda and disinformation. However, NATO’s current efforts to strengthen resilience focus on preventing disruption to military deployments to ensure effective deterrence and defense.¹⁰ Beyond the military realm, NATO treats resilience as one facet of its efforts, not a core task. But NATO has several options as its disposal to broaden its resilience portfolio. To begin with, NATO could provide technical assistance funds to the Baltic states to help them build Russian-language media outlets from the ground up. This assistance should cover capacity building, program development, public relations, and branding. To be comprehensive, these efforts should include traditional media outlets—such as newspapers, television, and radio—as well as social media and internet resources. The aim would be to provide a counternarrative to Russian propaganda and help audiences distinguish between facts and fake news. While such efforts to build resilience would be much cheaper than most military options, any positive effects would only be seen in the coming decades. At the same time, allies might struggle to reach a consensus on whether NATO, a military alliance, is really the right organization for a soft power approach, not least because such efforts would run the risk of being seen as NATO-sponsored propaganda. Since NATO already cooperates with the EU on resilience,¹¹ Brussels would, perhaps, be better placed to lead such efforts.

NATO watchdog programs and/or states self-reporting solves ethnic tensions

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Another option for NATO could be to closely monitor the state of integration, rights, and treatment of Russian minorities in the Baltics, and to intervene, perhaps through a special civilian monitoring and advisory mission, in cases of concern. Such a watchdog institution could help signal to Russia that NATO is taking the issue seriously. NATO does not currently play a role on minority rights within member states and is wary about infringing on members’ sovereignty. It could, therefore, be quite difficult to reach a consensus about allowing NATO to intervene directly in the domestic policies of its member states. Allies with a poor track record in terms of democratic institutions and the rule of law, including Turkey or Hungary (and, to a lesser extent, Poland), might even view this as a dangerous legal precedent. In addition, institutionalized monitoring might inadvertently come across as exactly the kind of stigmatization of the Baltic countries that Russia wishes to generate. But NATO is an alliance of shared values, and the integration and fair treatment of Russian minorities in the Baltic states is too important a matter to leave unattended. If allies found NATO monitoring to be unacceptable, they could opt for self-reporting. Obviously, self-reporting by the Baltic states would have its weaknesses, but such an approach could be accompanied by behind-the-scenes pressure from other allies to ensure

reports were meaningful. Another option would be to task the OSCE, which is also concerned with human rights, with an enhanced monitoring role. The problem there, however, is that Russia has a veto in that organization. Increasing the resilience of NATO members against Russian meddling should not stop with the Baltic states. As Russian attempts to interfere in the elections of France, the Netherlands, and the United States have all shown, strengthening the cyber defenses of governmental agencies as well as political parties is a first necessary step to prevent the deliberate leaking of confidential information. NATO should make national resilience measures in the cyber realm count toward the alliance's 2 percent defense spending target. Furthermore, allies need to make their publics aware that they are being influenced by Moscow, either directly or through proxies. Since a growing number of citizens treat their own governmental institutions with skepticism, national governments should cooperate, by sharing information about Russian interference, with independent civil society groups that are often seen as more credible. This approach carries the risk of looking like collusion, but it is a risk worth taking. One of the downsides of NATO focusing so heavily on Russia over the last few years, though entirely warranted, is a tendency to portray the Kremlin as an undefeatable "superman," which it clearly is not. Allies could therefore send a more determined public message to their own populations that what Moscow is doing is neither new nor significant enough to bring down Western democracy and the rule of law.

Black sea

NATO should focus on the Black Sea instead of the Baltics

Hamilton 2020 (Robert E. Hamilton, "NATO Needs to Focus on the Black Sea," August 4 2020, Defense One, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2020/08/nato-needs-focus-black-sea/167431/>)

There are three main reasons the Baltics are not the area of strategic vulnerability that some believe. First, "Narva is not next," and it never was. The alleged threat of separatism from Russian-speakers in the Baltics is overblown. Despite tensions in the early 1990s, which culminated with a July 1993 autonomy referendum in Estonia's third-largest city, Baltic Russian-speakers have never been the fifth column that some imagine them to be. And despite the persistence of restrictive citizenship laws for Russian-speakers in Latvia and Estonia, both governments have done an admirable job of addressing the social and economic concerns of their Russian-speaking regions, and of giving even non-citizens the right to vote in local elections. Next, NATO's presence in the Baltics and Poland is the right size: large enough to present a credible deterrent to Russia, but not large enough to present an offensive military threat. NATO was right to beef up its presence in the Baltics after 2014. After all, the three tiny Alliance members are simply incapable of defending themselves alone in the unlikely event of war with Russia. But deploying seven full brigades totaling 40,000 to 50,000 troops, as some analysts suggest, would be destabilizing. Russia would doubtless perceive this deployment as an offensive threat and increase its forces in response. The four NATO battle groups currently deployed – one each to the three Baltic republics and Poland – are important for their composition as much as their size. These 5,000-plus troops could do no more than delay a Russian incursion while NATO deployed reinforcements. But the fact that 24 of the 30 NATO members contribute forces to the Alliance's "Enhanced Forward Presence" mission makes it clear to Russia that NATO is united in its determination to defend the Baltics, and that war there means war with nearly all of NATO. Lastly, there is no indication that Moscow has any intention of invading the Baltics. Russia has always seen the Baltics as different from the rest of the former Soviet Union. In short, when the Kremlin looks at Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania it sees Europe, and it had always played by different rules in Europe than in its self-designated "near abroad". Anatol Lieven remarked on this Russian tendency in his book *The Baltic Revolution*: "A large proportion of Baltic Russians have been prepared to acknowledge that the Balts have a superior civic culture, are cleaner, more orderly and harder working. They may qualify this by saying that Russian life is 'friendlier', or 'more humane', but this is the exact reverse of the usual colonizer: colonized self-images." Russia's behavior toward the Baltic States immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union made clear the extent to which it treats them differently. As it was intervening on behalf of separatist movements in Georgia and Moldova, it scrupulously avoided escalating the situation with the Russian-speaking minorities in Latvia and Estonia. Despite the fact that Moscow was exceptionally unhappy with the treatment of Russian speakers there, and had military forces deployed to both countries until 1994, it always expressed its grievances through official, institutional channels instead of trying to rally the Russian-speaking minorities to violence or intervening directly as it did elsewhere. Rather than fixate on the Baltics, where the threat is low and a deterrent force is in place, NATO should pay more attention to the Black Sea region. It is here that Russia has already intervened militarily,

and is attempting to fracture the Alliance and erode confidence in its commitments. The Black Sea region also serves as the hub for Russia's recent expansion into the Eastern Mediterranean and is critical to its efforts to support its intervention in Syria.

There are numerous reasons why the Black Sea is of more strategic importance

Hamilton 2020 (Robert E. Hamilton, "NATO Needs to Focus on the Black Sea," August 4 2020, Defense One, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2020/08/nato-needs-focus-black-sea/167431/>)

There are four main reasons the Black Sea region demands more attention. First, three of the six littoral states – Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey – are NATO members and two – Ukraine and Georgia – were promised membership in 2008. Whether the Alliance should have committed to membership for Ukraine and Georgia is no longer relevant; it made the commitment and routinely reiterates it at NATO summits. Every year that the fear of Russia's reaction delays progress on bringing Kyiv and Tbilisi into NATO erodes confidence in NATO's other commitments. Next, an examination of Russian military activities in the last decade-plus leads to the conclusion that the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean is the area of greatest geopolitical importance for Russia. All of its military interventions in this period – Georgia, Ukraine and Syria – have occurred in this region, and Moscow clearly intends to challenge the West in this part of the world. NATO provides the best vehicle to meet this challenge and protect the important national interests Western states have in this region. Third, the increasing alignment between Russia and Turkey deserves immediate and serious attention from all NATO capitals. If Moscow is able to pull Ankara into a strategic partnership that distances it from NATO, the security of the Alliance and all its members would suffer significantly. Turkey is ranked the world's 11th-most powerful military by the Global Firepower Index. It has the second-largest overall military in NATO, after the U.S. Ankara is the second-largest land power in the Alliance, has the third-largest air force, and fields the fourth-largest navy. It is far from certain that a Russia-Turkey entente will endure: the two are on the opposite sides of the Libyan civil war, and their cooperation in Syria may still collapse over the issue of Idlib and the fate of Assad. And Ankara is an unpredictable and often frustrating ally. But neither the uncertainty of the Russia-Turkey rapprochement nor Turkey's erratic behavior outweigh its clear strategic importance to NATO. In addition to the military power it possesses, it anchors the Alliance's southeastern flank and hosts bases critical to the projection of NATO power in the Black Sea region and beyond. Finally, the Black Sea is an emerging energy hub that could allow Europe to diversify its energy sources away from Russia. But Turkey is key here, as well. The Turkish port of Ceyhan is the terminus of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which brings Azerbaijani oil to the world market. And Turkey's development of gas pipelines, storage facilities, and liquid natural gas terminals position it as a powerful middleman – and alternative to Russia – in energy supplies to Europe. With energy security an increasingly important component of national security, the emergence of the Black Sea as an energy hub provides an important opportunity for NATO members to erode Russia's ability to use energy as a weapon in its foreign policy. NATO has it right in the Baltics. Its presence is sized for the threat – large enough to present a credible deterrent, too small to pose an offensive military threat and activate the security dilemma, causing Russia to increase its own forces in response. And NATO has been vigilant in exercising what it would take to rapidly reinforce the Baltics, through exercises like Defender 2020. Before it was scaled back

due to the coronavirus pandemic, Defender 2020 was billed as the third-largest exercise in Europe since the end of the Cold War. Plans for Defender 2021 are already underway. The Black Sea region needs more attention. As Ben Hodges — former U.S. Army-Europe commander — and his co-authors argue, NATO should use the Enhanced Forward Presence model it deployed in the Baltics as a model for its Black Sea presence. This would entail beefing up the forces assigned to NATO’s Multi-National Division-Southeast (MND-SE) in Romania, deploying integrated air and missile defenses, and increasing the air policing of the region, as NATO has done in the Baltics. In order to compensate for the Montreux Convention’s limitations on the presence of warships from non-Black Sea littoral states, NATO could bolster its airborne maritime domain awareness assets deployed to the region. None of these steps need to detract from NATO’s presence in Poland and the Baltics – the Alliance has sufficient assets to resource both its current presence there and the enhanced Black Sea presence argued for here. Indeed, as Hodges and his co-authors argue, balancing the Alliance’s posture between the Baltic and Black seas would eliminate any gaps or seams for Moscow to exploit.

Provoking escalation

Deterrence by denial could cause Russian escalation

Carnegie Endowment for National Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, "NATO's Options," <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/nato-s-options-pub-75883>)

Second, instead of preventing deliberate Russian escalation this deterrence-by-denial approach could, in fact, reinforce Russian perceptions of insecurity. Russia would be loath to accept a NATO force that size so close to its borders. Moscow might seek to prevent NATO force deployments through various means, including, not inconceivably, by considering the preventive use of force (that is, Russia might wage a war because it could only see its position deteriorating in the future). This risk might become more acute in the early stages of a crisis when Russia could misinterpret the large-scale movement of sizable forces, such as the 70,000 personnel reinforcement the RAND study suggested, as NATO preparations for a preemptive attack on Russia. Third, large-scale conventional deployments could help further solidify Russian reliance on its nuclear deterrent and could even serve to lower Russia's threshold for nuclear use, making the early employment of nuclear weapons more likely.

There are less drastic options

Non-substantial increases in defense commitments solve the pro

Carnegie Endowment for National Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, “NATO’s Options,” <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/nato-s-options-pub-75883>)

NATO could also seek to improve its existing trip wire approach in the conventional realm and eliminate some of the ambiguities inherent to the alliance’s nuclear deterrence approach. Different options are available. First, if NATO wants to increase its capability to impose costs on Moscow, while at the same time avoid escalating general tensions with Russia and maintaining alliance unity, it could add additional personnel and equipment significantly below the level of seven permanently deployed heavily armed brigades. Whether NATO could reach consensus on deploying, for instance, two additional brigades is nevertheless not sure at all. Moscow, meanwhile, would probably view this as an invitation to reciprocate—something it has not done so far in response to EFP deployments. Furthermore, it is more than questionable from a military point of view whether two additional brigades would be able to hold off a Russian attack long enough for NATO to send in reinforcements. That said, even two additional brigades would raise the military costs Russia would face for invading a NATO member, thereby threatening pain that Moscow might hope to avoid. Second, a more modest approach would be for NATO to address some of its existing military shortcomings—by increasing the chance that the trip wire were triggered and would result in a timely political decision by NATO to respond—with the goal of strengthening the credibility of NATO’s deterrence approach and thus preventing deliberate Russian escalation. For instance, if NATO wants to make sure that the EFP is involved in combat as early as possible in the event of a Russian attack, it could rethink the geographical location of EFP bases or add an additional small element of forward-deployed forces that would continuously patrol and monitor the borders with Russia. That way, NATO would limit Russia’s ability to send small disguised units over the border. NATO could also consider asking Washington to add some U.S. forces to the three Baltic states to address any concern that some of the EFP’s contributing nations might lack resolve in the event of a Russian attack. In doing so, NATO would strengthen assurance by heeding calls by the Baltics for U.S. boots on the ground.

Strengthening of nuclear posture can happen without a substantial increase in defense commitments

Carnegie Endowment for National Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, “NATO’s Options,” <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/nato-s-options-pub-75883>)

Given these risks, NATO alternatively could seek to enhance the overall security of its members in other ways, while hoping to avoid a costly and potentially destabilizing nuclear arms race with Russia and without undermining alliance unity in the traditionally controversial field of nuclear deterrence and assurance.⁵ This alternative option would involve relying more heavily on U.S. bombers for signaling and exercises. Indeed, NATO allies are already moving in this direction. In conjunction with NATO’s 2017 Baltic Operations (BALTOPS) and Saber Strike exercises, for example, the U.S. Air Force sent B-52 and B-2 nuclear-capable bombers to the United Kingdom.⁶ While increased reliance on U.S. bombers allows NATO to avoid the toxic debate about its

forward-deployed nuclear deterrent, this choice comes with the downside of increasing the risk of inadvertent escalation. In the event of a nuclear crisis with Russia, Moscow could misread bomber deployments as preparations for a strategic strike against Russian territory and, in response, opt for early nuclear use. NATO could therefore consider communicating alert levels to Russia in the event of a (nuclear) crisis. Given these trade-offs, the alliance could further strengthen the credibility of its nuclear deterrent posture—not by adding (new) capabilities or missions—but by conveying a clearer message of political resolve. This approach would require an inclusive political process, backed by all allies. Public as well as private messages from individual NATO heads of state and government should convey the unified message to the Kremlin that NATO is willing to defend its members with all means necessary. High-level political and military leaders from NATO members should also appear regularly in the Baltic states to publicly stress that NATO is able to inflict unacceptable damage on any opponent in the event of an attack on one of its members.

Nuke war

Nuclear escalation is a risk

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2018 (March 28 2018, “Consequences for NATO,” <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/consequences-for-nato-pub-75881>)

Beyond the aforementioned risks of conventional escalation, additional escalation pathways extend to the nuclear realm of the NATO-Russia relationship. In its official documents, NATO is upfront and states that the alliance reserves the right to use nuclear weapons. At the same time, it concedes that “the circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated are extremely remote.”⁴³ However, that does not necessarily imply that the alliance would be unwilling to use nuclear weapons in the event of a crisis. But words are only one part of the equation. The other is that NATO has put much less emphasis on its nuclear deterrent in Europe since the end of the Cold War. The alliance has forward-deployed an estimated 150 U.S. B-61 gravity bombs in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey.⁴⁴ The gravity bombs deployed in Turkey are not operational as long as nuclear-capable aircraft are not stationed at the İncirlik Air Base. As noted before, Russia has an estimated 2,000 tactical nuclear arms, many of which are assumed to be stored in depots in the western (European) part of the country, and Moscow regularly conducts exercises to simulate the transition from conventional to nuclear warfare. That said, even though Russia now relies heavily on the threat of nuclear use, and even though NATO has reduced its reliance on nuclear arms, the alliance still threatens nuclear use to try and deter a Russian attack against the Baltics.⁴⁵ There are, nonetheless, a range of views within NATO on its nuclear posture. To begin with, nuclear weapons are generally very unpopular in all of the five NATO states that host U.S. B-61 bombs; politicians in Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands have regularly responded to this domestic sentiment by seeking to remove these U.S. weapons.⁴⁶ Moreover, some alliance members do not see an immediate need to take steps to bolster NATO’s nuclear posture in the wake of Russia’s annexation of Crimea. As a result, in recent years, member states have shied away from an open debate about NATO’s nuclear deterrent, and NATO’s nuclear policy has not been updated. In fact, like Russia’s nuclear doctrine, NATO’s current nuclear policy contains quite an element of ambiguity as well. Would NATO be ready to use nuclear weapons in a conflict with Russia? The answer is far from obvious given the contradictions between the alliance’s official declaratory policy and members’ divergent views on nuclear arms. The resulting inadvertent ambiguity could in fact prevent escalation, for Russia might shy away from testing NATO’s nuclear resolve. On the other hand, this ambiguity could also invite deliberate nuclear escalation if Russia misreads it.

Article 5

Article 5 is unpopular

Dempsey 2015 (Judy Dempsey, "NATO's European Allies Won't Fight for Article 5," June 15 2015, Carnegie Europe, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=60389>)

Between April 6 and May 15, 2015, the Pew Research Center carried out a survey of 11,116 respondents in eight NATO countries as well as in Russia and Ukraine. The NATO countries were Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The respondents from these countries were asked about Ukraine and Russia. Few surprises here. Across all eight nations, a median of 70 percent supported sending economic aid to Ukraine, and 57 percent backed Ukraine joining NATO—although Germany and Italy came out strongly against, with respectively only 36 percent and 35 percent of respondents in favor. On average, 41 percent of all those surveyed supported sending arms to Ukraine, and 50 percent favored Ukraine joining the EU. But when it came to committing to upholding Article 5—the alliance's sacred cow, which requires NATO members to defend an ally if it is attacked—the results were devastating. The Pew poll showed that among Europeans, a median of 49 percent of respondents thought their country should not defend an ally, a response that exposes a lack of commitment to collective defense. Not only that: the majority of Europeans (67 percent), with the surprising exception of the Poles (49 percent), believed the United States would come to the defense of its allies. Despite war-weariness in the United States and Canada, these are the two countries that are willing to use force if Russia attacks a NATO ally. That was the view of 56 percent of Americans and 53 percent of Canadians. The United States is also proposing to store heavy weapons and equipment for up to 5,000 troops in Eastern Europe. What a commitment to NATO and to Europe. Of the Europeans polled, the Brits were the most in favor of the use of force to defend their allies (49 percent). As for the Poles, of whom a whopping 70 percent saw Russia as a major military threat to neighboring countries, only 48 percent of those surveyed supported military action in case of an attack. What that could reveal is that Poland's decision in February 2015 to beef up its military spending to the equivalent of 2 percent of GDP was aimed at the country's own defenses and was not particularly designed to strengthen NATO. In addition, Poland now seems more interested in developing closer military cooperation with the Baltic states (also members of NATO) and with Finland and Sweden (nonmembers), rather than depend entirely on NATO. It's as if Poland doesn't completely trust NATO as a collective alliance, as the poll confirms. But the country doesn't seem to trust the United States either. That aside, the biggest response against using force against Russia came from Germany. Only 38 percent of Germans, the lowest score among the eight NATO allies polled, would use force to defend an ally. This seems to jar with Germany's decision to become involved in training exercises in Poland. Germany has joined NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, a spearhead force created in September 2014 that is to be deployed to Eastern Europe. Berlin intends to send 1,000 troops to a 5,000-strong brigade. Prior to its agreement to participate in this operation, Germany had opposed NATO deploying permanent bases in Eastern Europe. Maybe this is a compensation gesture. If it is, then it calls into question statements by the German president, foreign minister, and defense minister about the need for the country to take more responsibility for security and to stop using the past as an excuse for passivity. Bruce Stokes, Pew's director of global economic attitudes, told Carnegie Europe that the survey results for

Germany “suggest that the scars of the Cold War remain.” Older Germans, he said, were less likely than younger ones to be willing to confront the Russians. And a generation after the country’s 1990 reunification, “Germany is still a divided country when it comes to public opinion. When it comes to Russia, Ukraine, and NATO, Germans in the former East just think differently than Germans in the former West,” Stokes added. Yet Germany’s pacifism, its ambivalent relationship with the United States (including NATO), and a deep-seated Ostpolitik (or Eastern policy) based on cooperation with Russia all have an impact too. Combined with the Pew findings, these traits and trends show the vulnerability of German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s policies. As the European leader who has rallied the EU behind sanctions against Russia and who is trying to support a very fragile ceasefire in eastern Ukraine, she has managed to carry the German public with her. That support cannot be taken for granted. The Pew survey showed that only one in five Germans wanted more economic pressure applied to Moscow. And Germans (29 percent) are the most likely among the NATO allies polled to want to reduce the sanctions against Russia. Overall, the depressing aspect of the Pew poll is how, once again, the Europeans take the United States as their security guarantor for granted. Why successive U.S. administrations tolerate this is hard to fathom. Europe is prosperous. It should be confident enough both to take care of its own security and to contribute to a greater role in burden sharing. It does neither. Furthermore, despite so many criticisms of the European allies from former U.S. defense secretaries, Europeans have developed a built-in dependence culture and a sense of entitlement to U.S. defense. Because they assume the Americans will come to their defense, why should the Europeans bother to build up a strong security and defense policy? This is as shortsighted as it is dangerous for the transatlantic relationship. The longer the Europeans refuse to even consider the use of military force to protect their allies, the more NATO’s sense of collective defense and solidarity will weaken. The inexorable outcome is the demise of Article 5. What then is NATO for?