

RUSSIA'S HYBRID WARFARE: THE PROWESS  
AND LIMITATIONS OF PUTIN'S (IN)VISIBLE  
HAND IN ESTONIA AND LATVIA

by

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## THESIS ABRSTRACT

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Title: Russia's Hybrid Warfare: The Prowess and Limitations of Putin's (In)Visible Hand in Estonia and Latvia

Russia's recent increase in acts of aggression against bordering nations is concerning. After Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula, many wondered if the world should anticipate a Baltic intervention. This paper seeks to analyze this question through a comparative study of Russia's recent interventions in Georgia and Ukraine, an analysis of the Estonian and Latvian Russian-speaking population, and an analysis of the NATO alliance's strengths and weaknesses in deterring a possible Russian threat. From my analysis, I conclude that a conventional Baltic intervention is unlikely. However, I also conclude that the NATO alliance is not prepared to counter non-conventional acts of aggression and that these tactics could become more common in international conflicts. Therefore, I also conclude that a non-conventional Baltic intervention from Russia is possible and, consequently, the alliance should re-examine its framework.

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## DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to my family, who has always supported me during my adventures in Eastern Europe and my academic pursuits. I would also like to dedicate this manuscript to Peter Ward, my REEES colleague, for helping me navigate this incredible opportunity at the University of Oregon.

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## CHAPTER I

### A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON RUSSIAN INTERVENTIONS

Russia's recent acts of aggression in bordering states warrant some concern, particularly regarding the Baltic states. Though the likelihood of Russia engaging in conventional warfare with Estonia or Latvia is slim because of NATO membership, perhaps it should not be overlooked. The aim of this study is to analyze Russia's recent interventions in Georgia and Ukraine to determine key similarities and differences that might indicate a future action in the Baltic countries of Estonia and Latvia.

In this chapter, I start with a brief description of the events in Georgia and Ukraine, followed by a discussion of the similarities that I view are most relevant in determining a Russian intervention in the future: bordering geography, Russia's use of international texts for justification, and the presence of a "window of opportunity" with an allegedly discriminated compatriot population. I also discuss a significant difference between the two conflicts, which is Russia's evolving capability of engaging in new generation warfare tactics. In the next chapter, I use statistics from Estonia and Latvia to assess whether Russia could build a similar argument to intervene in the name of humanitarian goals. Statistics show that Russian-speaking communities in both countries experience higher unemployment and at-risk poverty rates. Furthermore, Russia's allegations that these governments are ignoring or exacerbating this problem of inequality seems valid. Next, I discuss aspects of the NATO alliance that may not be prepared to confront a conventional or non-conventional Russian threat in the Baltics. I conclude with some final remarks and observations.

*Russia's Shocks the World with Georgian Intervention*

After Georgia's independence and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the government in Tbilisi faced political challenges from two regions, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, regarding political status. South Ossetia felt Tbilisi's economic policies disadvantaged South Ossetians and Abkhazia wanted its autonomy reinstated, which the Soviets abolished in 1931.<sup>1</sup> Conflict with the government eventually spurred the outbreak of two civil wars; one with South Ossetia from 1991-1992 and the other with Abkhazia from 1992-1993.<sup>2</sup> Russia, worried about instability spilling over into its territory, helped broker a cease-fire agreement for each conflict with the Sochi Agreement.<sup>3</sup> The agreement permitted around 1,100 Russian peacekeepers to be stationed in both regions to ensure continued peace.<sup>4</sup>

Tensions between these two regions and Tbilisi remained high, with South Ossetia even declaring its "independence" from Georgia after a referendum in 2006.<sup>5</sup> During the summer of 2008, violence sparked again between South Ossetia and the Georgian government after a bomb killed a South Ossetian police chief.<sup>6</sup> On August 7th, Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili declared a unilateral ceasefire on the Georgian side, urging

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<sup>1</sup> Souleimanov, Emil. Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict : Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia Wars Reconsidered. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Print. Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies. 130-131.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.; 147-148.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Nichol, Jim. "Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests". *Congressional Research Service*. March 3, 2009. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34618.pdf>. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: 4.

the South Ossetian militias to do the same.<sup>7</sup> According to Saakashvili, the Ossetian militias continued shelling Georgian villages, forcing him to order an attack on Tskhinvali with the goal of restoring order to the area.<sup>8</sup> However, several Russian peacekeepers died as a result of Georgia's attack.<sup>9</sup>

In response, Russia entered Georgia on August 8th, fighting alongside South Ossetian militias.<sup>10</sup> Shortly thereafter, violence also erupted in Abkhazia.<sup>11</sup> August 10 statements from U.N. officials reported aerial bombings targeting Georgian troops in the Kodri Valley and increased movement of Abkhazian militia forces.<sup>12</sup> Fighting continued to escalate as Russian and Abkhazian forces advanced towards the Abkhazian and Georgian border, causing Georgians in the Kodri Valley to flee.<sup>13</sup>

Only five days after the beginning of the conflict, France helped broker a peace plan. In the agreement Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were labeled as “parties to the conflict,” while France, on behalf of the EU, and Russia were labeled “mediators”.<sup>14</sup> The agreement called for a ceasefire of hostilities, access to humanitarian aide, a withdrawal of Russian combat troops, and a retreat of Russian “peacekeepers” to pre-conflict numbers

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.: 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.: 3-6.

<sup>10</sup> “2008 Georgia Russia Conflict Fast Facts”. *CNN News*. March 26, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/13/world/europe/2008-georgia-russia-conflict/>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.: 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.: 7-8.

within the areas designated in the Sochi Agreement.<sup>15</sup> Any specific mention of Georgia's territorial integrity, however, was not included.<sup>16</sup> On August 26, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed decrees officially recognizing the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which he stated was in response to the will of the people and right to self-determination.<sup>17</sup> However under international law, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are still considered regions of Georgia.<sup>18</sup> South Ossetia and Abkhazia continue to endure a frozen conflict.

*...and Again in Ukraine*

Russia shocked the world again when entering Ukraine after months of political protests. In 2012, the EU started negotiating the Eastern Partnership Agreement with former Soviet states with the goal of promoting economic stability through EU sponsored reforms and enhanced bilateral and multilateral cooperation with Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.<sup>19</sup> Economists hoped lowering trade barriers would stimulate Ukraine's economy, which was suffering more in comparison to other central and eastern European countries after its transition to a market economy.<sup>20</sup> When Ukrainian

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). "Address by the President of the Russian Federation." *President of Russia*. August 26, 2008. Web.

<sup>18</sup> "Statement by the President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili". *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia*. August 26, 2008. Web.

<sup>19</sup> "The Third Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius". Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2013. December 2, 2013. <http://www.eu2013.lt/en/vilnius-summit>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.:

president Victor Yanukovich took office in 2010, many thought the Russian-leaning president still planned to sign the trade agreement.

Expectations changed, however, in November 2013. A few weeks before Ukraine was expected to sign the agreement at the Vilnius Summit, Yanukovich released a decree officially suspending Ukraine's negotiations on the Partnership Agreement.<sup>21</sup> According to the Ukrainian government, the suspension of the EU Partnership Agreement was in consideration of the country's "national interests," whose partnership with the West could bring severe repercussions from its biggest trading partner, Russia.<sup>22</sup> Instead of the EU trade agreement, Yanukovich signed a deal with Putin, in which Russia committed to buy 15 billion dollars of Ukrainian bonds and lowered the price of gas for Ukraine by 30% until 2019.<sup>23</sup> Although this agreement gave Ukraine quick and direct access to investment for development, it also kept Ukraine under the Kremlin's "sphere of influence" and the West out.

After the gas deal with Russia, protests in Kyiv escalated, leading to the dissolution of Yanukovich's government and the president's loss of power. In a final attempt to bring back stability and security to Ukraine, President Yanukovich signed a peace agreement that decreased the presidential powers, guaranteed constitutional reform by September

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<sup>21</sup> Traynor, Ian, and Grytsenko, Oksana. "Ukraine Suspends Talks on EU Trade Pact as Putin Wins Tug of War". *The Guardian*. November 21, 2013. Web. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/21/ukraine-suspends-preparations-eu-trade-pact>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Walker, Shaun. "Vladimir Putin Offers Ukraine Financial Incentives to Stick with Russia". *The Guardian*. December 18, 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/17/ukraine-russia-leaders-talks-kremlin-loan-deal>.

2014, and promised new presidential elections by December 2014.<sup>24</sup> Immediately following the agreement, Yanukovich fled to Eastern Ukraine and then to Russia, claiming that he was escaping a political “coup” against him.<sup>25</sup> Shortly after Yanukovich fled the country, Russian troops entered Crimea to secure its military facilities, such as the Black Sea Fleet, and, allegedly, to protect the lives of Russian citizens in Crimea and give the peninsula the right to self-determination.<sup>26</sup> However, scholars like Daniel Treisman has noted that Putin had historically shown little interest in Crimean self-determination and views the nationalist threat to Crimea as “invented.”<sup>27</sup> Unidentified soldiers, known as “little green men” stormed the Crimean parliament building, raising the Russian flag over the building.<sup>28</sup> When asked about the identity of these soldiers, Putin claimed they were Crimean “self-defense forces” who had independently acquired military gear and denied any allegations suggesting these individuals were connected with Russia.<sup>29</sup> After the storming of the Crimean parliament, the local government held a referendum, which

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<sup>24</sup> Traynor, Ian. “Ukraine Opposition Leader Sign Deal with Government”. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/21/ukraine-president-says-deal-has-been-reached-opposition-bloodshed>.

<sup>25</sup> Edward, Anna. “Moment Suspected Ukrainian Sniper was Dragged by the Hair and Beaten by Anti-Government Protesters as President Reportedly Flees Capital”. *Daily Mail*. February 22, 2014. Web. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2565394/Ukrainian-protesters-claim-control-capital.html>; Englund, Will. "Ukraine's ousted president surfaces in Russia, says he is still head of state". *The Washington Post*. February 27, 2014. Web. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/gunmens-seizure-of-parliament-building-stokes-tensions-in-ukraines-crimea/2014/02/27/2539871c-9f83-11e3-9ba6-800d1192d08b\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.6c2a613b95aa](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/gunmens-seizure-of-parliament-building-stokes-tensions-in-ukraines-crimea/2014/02/27/2539871c-9f83-11e3-9ba6-800d1192d08b_story.html?utm_term=.6c2a613b95aa).

<sup>26</sup> Treisman, Daniel. “Why Putin Took Crimea”. *Foreign Policy Online*. May/June 2016. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2016-04-18/why-putin-took-crimea>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Shevchenko, Vitaly. “‘Little Green Men’ of ‘Russian Invaders?’”. *BBC News*. March 11, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26532154>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.:

reported 95% of voters supported seceding from Ukraine to join Russia.<sup>30</sup> Europe declared the statement illegal and did not recognize the results.<sup>31</sup>

The conflict in Ukraine continued to escalate in April, when protestors against the new government in Kyiv occupied government buildings in eastern Ukraine and declared the “Luhansk People’s Republic” (LPR) and the “Donetsk People’s Republic” (DNR).<sup>32</sup> As in Crimea, these cities also held referendums where a majority of voters were in favor of seceding from Ukraine.<sup>33</sup> However, unlike Crimea, these referendums asked about autonomy and special status instead of joining Russia.<sup>34</sup> Ukraine, the United States, the European Union, and Russia did not recognize the referendums.<sup>35</sup>

Since the referendum, fighting has continued in the region, with separatist forces fighting against the Ukrainian army. Though there were two peace agreement attempts, the region continues to be in conflict with the Ukrainian government and Ukrainian Army, with no resolution in the near future.<sup>36</sup> There is controversy over how the separatist forces are seemingly so well prepared to fight the Ukrainian army. Media sources and a European

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<sup>30</sup> Morris, Chris. “Crimea Referendum: Voters ‘Back Russia Union’”. *BBC*. March 16, 2014. Web. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26606097>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Rosenberg, Steve. “Ukraine Crisis: Protesters Declare Donetsk ‘Republic’”. *BBC*. April 7, 2014. Web. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26919928>.

<sup>33</sup> Amos, Grytsenko and Walker. “Ukraine: Pro-Russia Separatists Set for Victory in Eastern Region Referendum”. *The Guardian*. May 12, 2014. Web. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/11/eastern-ukraine-referendum-donetsk-luhansk>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> MacFarquhar, Neil . "Russia Keeps Its Distance After Ukraine Secession Referendums". *The New York Times*. May 12, 2014. Web. [https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/13/world/europe/ukraine.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/13/world/europe/ukraine.html?_r=1).

<sup>36</sup> Miller, Christopher. “Everyone Seems to Have A Peace Plan for Ukraine”. *Radio Free Europe*. February 23, 2017. Web. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-peace-plans-fighting-yanukovych-artemenko-kilimnik/28327624.html>.

Court decision have claimed that Russia provides assistance, such as equipment and personnel, to the separatist forces, prolonging a resolution.<sup>37</sup> Denying these allegations, the Kremlin claims that the separatists acquired their weapons from local warehouses and not from the Russian government.<sup>38</sup> Much like the Georgia conflict, Ukraine is left with a frozen conflict, which continues decreasing the country's security and stability.

### **Aspects of Russian Intervention: Similarities and Developments**

In many ways, Russia's actions in Georgia and Ukraine were similar in terms of geography, Russia's use of international agreements to justify its actions, and the presence of Russian "compatriots," individuals with some Russian connection. However, a unique feature of Russia's actions in Ukraine has been the Kremlin's continued denial of backing separatists forces in the eastern Donbas region. This difference represents Russia's evolving warfare strategy and, possibly, an increase in Putin's risk assessment in his decision-making analysis. The following similarities and differences might shed light onto how Russia views intervention tactics, which would be useful when analyzing the possibility of a future Baltic intervention.

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<sup>37</sup> One example can be found at: Grove, Thomas and Warren Strobel. "Special Report: Where Ukraine's Separatists get their Weapons". *Reuters Online*. July 29, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-arms-specialreport-idUSKBN0FY0UA20140729>; "The General Court upholds the freezing of funds of the Russian company Almaz Antey". *General Court of the European Union Press Release*. January 25, 2017. <https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2017-01/cp170006en.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> Grove, Thomas and Strobel, Warren.

## *Bordering Geography with Russia*

Perhaps geography played a role in the Kremlin's decision to intervene in Georgia and Ukraine. When considering economics and logistics, it would likely be less expensive and easier to implement a military action in a bordering state than one across the continent. There is also a historical connection, as Ukraine and Georgia were part of the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup> However, there is another interesting border development. Apart from the Baltics, Russia is bordered by states with frozen conflicts, all of which somehow involved Russia either as a participant, mediator or supporter.<sup>40</sup> Russia's indifference in finding a resolution to any of these conflicts suggests that the Kremlin is complacent with prolonged instability along its borders.<sup>41</sup> This is a change from previous Russian preferences. As mentioned earlier, Russia was concerned that the violence and instability from the Georgian civil wars would spill over into its territory, motivating the Kremlin to mediate conflict resolution shortly after the conflicts' outbreak. Now, the Kremlin seems comfortable with starting and supporting conflicts along its border. With this new behavioral tendency, one might question if Russia will try to intervene in Estonia and Latvia even though these states are NATO members.

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<sup>39</sup> Orttung, Robert and Christopher Walker. "Putin's Frozen Conflicts". *The Foreign Policy Group*. February 13, 2015. Web. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/13/putins-frozen-conflicts/>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

## *Russia's Ability to Create Legitimacy*

Russia uses the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act to claim that its actions in Georgia and Ukraine were legal under the auspices of international law.<sup>42</sup> In Georgia, Russia argues its military actions were in response to the Russian peacekeepers killed during Georgia's attack on Tshkinvali.<sup>43</sup> Article 51 of the UN Charter grants states "the right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs."<sup>44</sup> Although it could be argued that Russian citizens killed in foreign territory, voiding Russia's right to act on Article 51, these peacekeepers were stationed in South Ossetia to fulfill Russia's obligations in the Sochi Agreements.<sup>45</sup> Independent reports confirmed that if Russian peacekeepers were harmed, then the use of military force against Georgia would be legal.<sup>46</sup>

When acting in self-defense, the goals of the military action should be to restore international peace and security.<sup>47</sup> Yet, Russian military action continued beyond the initial point of conflict, suggesting that Russia's initial response to Georgia's attack against

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<sup>42</sup> "Transcript of Remarks and Response to Media Questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov at Joint Press-Conference After Meeting with Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland." *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*. August 12, 2008. [http://www.mid.ru/en/press\\_service/minister\\_speeches/-/asset\\_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/328478](http://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/328478).

<sup>43</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," *President of Russia*, March 18th, 2014. [en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603](http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603).

<sup>44</sup> *Charter of the United Nations*. United Nations. 24 October 1945, 1 UNTS XVI. Art. 51; *Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFMCG) Vol. 1. Council of the European Union*. September, 2009. [http://www.mpil.de/en/pub/publications/archive/independent\\_international\\_fact.cfm](http://www.mpil.de/en/pub/publications/archive/independent_international_fact.cfm). 23.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*: 14.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*: 23.

<sup>47</sup> *Charter of the United Nations*. Art. 51.

Russian peacekeepers falls within the rights of the UN Charter, but its advance beyond the conflict is illegitimate.<sup>48</sup>

Russia has used states' right to self-determination as justification for recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia's "independence" or for illegally annexing Crimea. Under Article 1 (2) of the UN Charter, participating member states agree to "respect...the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples."<sup>49</sup> The first principle of the Helsinki Final Act also gives states the right to self-determination. Using these international agreements, the Kremlin has argued it is because of its commitment to humanitarianism and international law that it recognizes the "will of the people" by recognizing their independence.<sup>50</sup>

Russia's view of international law, however, seems to be selective. If using these same texts, Russia's actions are also illegal. For example, according to international law, territories within a nation cannot unilaterally create a new state under the principle of self-determination.<sup>51</sup> Thus, South Ossetia and Abkhazia's independence cannot be internationally recognized. In addition, the first principle in the Helsinki Final Act guarantees that states' sovereignty and territorial integrity will be recognized.<sup>52</sup> According to Article 73 of Ukraine's constitution, "issues of altering the territory of Ukraine [shall be

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<sup>48</sup> *Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFFMCG) Vol. 1.* 24.

<sup>49</sup> *Charter of the United Nations*. Art. 1(2).

<sup>50</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). "Address by the President of the Russian Federation".

<sup>51</sup> *Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia IIFFMCG Vol. 1.* 17.

<sup>52</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), *Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE): Final Act of Helsinki*. August 1, 1975.

resolved] exclusively by an all-Ukrainian referendum.”<sup>53</sup> Georgia’s constitution has a similar clause in Article 38, stating, “the exercise of minority rights shall not oppose the sovereignty, state structure, territorial integrity and political independence of Georgia.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, by recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia’s “independence” or claiming Crimea’s referendum represented the will of the people, allowing for Russian ascension, the Kremlin is violating the Helsinki Final Act’s right for state sovereignty.

Russia argues that Georgia’s breakaway regions should be recognized as independent because of the international community’s recognition of Kosovo’s unilateral declaration for independence.<sup>55</sup> The Kremlin also tried to use Kosovo’s independence again to justify the annexation of Crimea.<sup>56</sup> However, the international community considered Kosovo to be a unique exception because of the horrific humanitarian violations and mass murder of Kosovar Albanians.<sup>57</sup> The International Court of Justice has even confirmed that the recognition of Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence was a special case.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Constitution of Ukraine*. Government of Ukraine. June 28, 1996. Art. 73. [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/cooperation/ccpe/profiles/ukraineConstitution\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/cooperation/ccpe/profiles/ukraineConstitution_en.asp).

<sup>54</sup> *Constitution of Georgia*. Government of Georgia. August 24, 1995. Art. 38. [http://www.parliament.ge/files/68\\_1944\\_951190\\_CONSTIT\\_27\\_12.06.pdf](http://www.parliament.ge/files/68_1944_951190_CONSTIT_27_12.06.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). “Address by the President of the Russian Federation”.

<sup>56</sup> Somin, Ilya. “Why the Kosovo ‘precedent’ does not justify Russia’s annexation of Crimea”. *The Washington Post*. March, 2014. [www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2014/03/24/crimea-kosovo-and-false-moral-equivalency/?utm\\_term=.96a1fb7394ad](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2014/03/24/crimea-kosovo-and-false-moral-equivalency/?utm_term=.96a1fb7394ad).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> “Accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence in respect of Kosovo, Summary of the Advisory Opinion”. *The International Court of Justice*. The Hague, Netherlands. July, 2010. <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/141/16010.pdf>.

Russia's behavior towards the situations in Georgia and Ukraine represent a selective reading, interpretation and enforcement of international law by the Kremlin. Russia's frequent inconsistent interpretation of international law shows its ability to use texts in its favor, creating its own justification for aggressive actions. The Kremlin's artful use of international law to create legitimacy for its actions suggests that an intervention in Estonia or Latvia or proxy support of a separatist movement in the region is not far-fetched.

*The Window of Opportunity: Russia's Compatriot Policy*

Although geography and legitimacy prepares Russia for a successful and fast intervention, the Kremlin's humanitarian allegations are the most essential feature for giving Russia a reason to enter sovereign territory. In Georgia and Ukraine, Russia argued its actions were for the sake of protecting Russian compatriots abroad, which has been an evolving foreign policy strategy since the fall of the Soviet Union. Originally used for individuals who formerly had Soviet citizenship, the term "compatriot" now refers to any person with "historical, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and spiritual" connection with Russia.<sup>59</sup> Reforms under Putin made it easier to use Russian compatriots as a foreign policy tool. In 2002, Putin signed "Federal Law No. 62-FZ on Russian Federation Citizenship" in 2002 that made it easier for former Soviet citizens to receive a Russian passport.<sup>60</sup> As of 2016, Russia's Foreign Policy Concept includes provisions "to ensure comprehensive, effective

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<sup>59</sup> Grigas, Agnia. *Beyond Crimea : The New Russian Empire*. New Haven ; London: Yale UP, 2016. Print. 77.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

protection of the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and compatriots residing abroad.”<sup>61</sup>

Putin’s passport reform likely contributed to the increasing the number of Georgian citizens in South Ossetia and Abkhazia holding a Russian passport. Statistics estimate that in 2006, around 50% of South Ossetians and Abkhazians had a Russian passport, but by 2009, that statistic had jumped to 90%.<sup>62</sup> This process of mass dissemination of Russia passports became known as “passportization.”<sup>63</sup> Distributing passports to South Ossetians and Abkhazians was an important strategy for Russia. Unlike in Crimea, where there are many Russian speakers, only 1.2% of Georgia speaks Russian as native language.<sup>64</sup> By distributing passports to these regions, Russia could claim them as compatriots and citizens, arguing it is the Kremlin’s responsibility to ensure their safety and well-being.

In comparison to Georgia, passport distribution played a smaller role in Russia’s strategy with Crimea because the Kremlin could claim Russian speakers as compatriots living abroad.<sup>65</sup> The Kremlin argued its intervention was mandated to protect these compatriots against Ukraine’s discriminatory policies, such as state language policies, that targeted Russian speakers and forced assimilation.<sup>66</sup> Though there were reports of

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<sup>61</sup> “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation”. *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*. December 1, 2016. [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/2542248](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/2542248).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*; 119.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*; 119-120.

<sup>64</sup> “Georgia”. *World Factbook: Central Intelligence Agency*. 2014. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>.

<sup>65</sup> “О внесении изменений в Федеральный закон ‘О государственной политике Российской Федерации в отношении соотечественников за рубежом’” *Президент России*. 27 Июля, 2010 г. [kremlin.ru/acts/bank/31503](http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/31503) доступен в мае, 2017 г.

passports being distributed to Ukrainians in Crimea, Putin's speech on Crimea highlighted the number of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in the region instead of the number of individuals holding Russian passports.<sup>67</sup>

Russia's intervention in Georgia and Ukraine demonstrate the important role of Russian compatriots in creating a "window of opportunity" for an intervention. As highlighted in these two interventions, a Russian passport or being a Russian-speaker creates that window. Claiming these interventions are to protect compatriots abroad likely also helps the Kremlin's public support. Putin cited public opinion surveys that reported 95% of the population believed the government should protect Russians in Crimea and 92% support its reunification with Russia.<sup>68</sup> The Kremlin's consistent rhetoric of protecting compatriots abroad likely contributes to the high levels of support by overshadowing the aggressive aspects with a softer humanitarian goal.

Russia's humanitarian "window of opportunity" should be concerning to Estonia and Latvia. Recent reforms in Russian policy has broadly defined a "compatriot" as possessing a cultural or linguistic connection with Russia, making it easier for the Kremlin to categorize its aggression as a humanitarian mission to protect compatriots living abroad. Since roughly 30% of the population in Estonia and Latvia are Russian speakers, the Kremlin might be able to pursue a humanitarian agenda in these states as well.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). "Address by the President of the Russian Federation".

<sup>67</sup> "Why Crimea is so dangerous". *BBC*. March 2014. [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26367786](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26367786).

<sup>68</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). "Address by the President of the Russian Federation".

<sup>69</sup> "Estonia". *The World Factbook*. Central Intelligence Agency. 2011. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>; "Latvia". *The World Factbook*.

*Russia's Evolving War Strategy for a New Generation*

The most significant difference between Russia's intervention in Ukraine and Georgia is the increase in unconventional tactics to pursue its political objectives. According to the United States Department of Defense Dictionary of Military terms, unconventional warfare involves

*“Activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force.”*<sup>70</sup>

Analysts have started referring to the blend of conventional and unconventional strategies, including covert affairs and disinformation campaigns, as “hybrid warfare,” with “hybrid threats” referring to the adversary who engages in hybrid warfare.<sup>71</sup>

Discourse on Russia's use of hybrid tactics gained momentum during the 2014 Maidan protests in Ukraine.<sup>72</sup> Many analysts started referring to a 2013 article by Russia's Chief of the General Staff Army-General Valeriy Gerasimov titled, “The Value of Science

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Central Intelligence Agency. 2011. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ig.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Department of Defense Dictionary of Military Terms, DOD Terminology Program, 2017, [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod\\_dictionary/](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod_dictionary/). 245.

<sup>71</sup> Landler, Mark and Michael R. Gordon, “NATO Chief Warns of Duplicity by Putin on Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 2014. [www.nytimes.com/2014/07/09/world/europe/nato-chief-warns-of-duplicity-by-putin-on-ukraine.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/09/world/europe/nato-chief-warns-of-duplicity-by-putin-on-ukraine.html?_r=1); Hoffman, Frank. “On Not-So-New Warfare: Political Warfare vs Hybrid Threats,” *War on the Rocks*, July 28, 2014. [warontherocks.com/2014/07/on-not-so-new-warfare-political-warfare-vs-hybrid-threats/](http://warontherocks.com/2014/07/on-not-so-new-warfare-political-warfare-vs-hybrid-threats/).

<sup>72</sup> McDermott, Roger N. “Does Russia Have a Gerasimov Doctrine?”. *Parameters* 46.1 (2016): 97-105. Web. ProQuest. 99.

is in Foresight” as being the key to understanding Russian modern warfare strategy.<sup>73</sup> In his article, Gerasimov comments on the increase in “asymmetrical actions” in conflict, largely by the West, with the goal of creating an internal opposition in a sovereign nation before intervening through conventional means of sending in “peacekeeping” forces to change the political leadership.<sup>74</sup> Gerasimov views the colour revolutions and the Arab Spring as examples when “a thriving state can...become a victim of foreign intervention, and sink into a web of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe, and civil war.”<sup>75</sup> Though recent articles by military analysts, such as Michael Kofman, have cautioned against viewing Gerasimov’s strategy as Russia’s new military doctrine, the Kremlin faces a dilemma in developing ways to counter these perceived western hybrid threats, possibly through hybrid strategies of its own.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, if Russia is creating its own hybrid strategies to counter threats, it is likely these strategies would be used in a Kremlin offensive attack.

The best example of Russia’s use of unconventional tactics was during the Ukraine conflict. Though the annexation and advancement of troops in Crimea displays many characteristics of a conventional operation, Ukraine’s eastern war in the Donbas region is different.<sup>77</sup> As mentioned earlier, reports have accused the Kremlin of supplying military

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<sup>73</sup> McDermott, Roger N. 98.

<sup>74</sup> Gerasimov, Valery. “The Value of Science is in the Foresight: New challenges demand rethinking the forms and methods of carrying out combat operations,” *Military Review*, 2016. [https://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview\\_20160228\\_art008.pdf](https://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20160228_art008.pdf). 24-25, 28.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>76</sup> Kofman, Michael. “Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Arts”. *War on the Rocks*. March 11, 2016. <https://warontherocks.com/2016/03/russian-hybrid-warfare-and-other-dark-arts/>; McDermott, Roger N., 101.

<sup>77</sup> Kofman, Michael.

equipment and personnel to the separatist forces in Ukraine's eastern region, which the government has repeatedly denied. This strategy could be described from Gerasimov's lists of non-military measures as the "formulation of the political opposition" and "actions of opposition forces," which occur at the beginning stages of conflict.<sup>78</sup> The peculiarity in this behavior is not the possibility of Russia supporting proxy forces, history provides plenty of examples when powerful states have participated in proxy wars, but rather that the Kremlin is covertly supporting these opposition forces. Russia openly supported the South Ossetian and Abkhazian militias in Georgia. Why would Ukraine be any different? Ukraine, like Georgia, is not a NATO member, thereby reducing the risk of mass retaliation from the West. Furthermore, a 2015 poll conducted by Pew Research Center reported a majority of Russians believed the "people's republics" should become independent states (35%) or join Russia (24%).<sup>79</sup>

Russia's expanded use of non-conventional warfare tactics could increase its chances of trying similar tactics in Estonia and Latvia. The Kremlin has executed two successful interventions in bordering states by pursuing a plan strategically catered to the environment.<sup>80</sup> With Estonia and Latvia being NATO members, the strategy of nonconventional tactics would be the best chance of Russia conducting a successful campaign, as conventional warfare with Russian troops would likely cause a NATO

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<sup>78</sup> Gerasimov, Valery. 24-25; 28.

<sup>79</sup> Simmons, Katie, Bruce Stokes, and Jacob Poushter. "NATO Publics Blame Russia for Ukrainian Crisis, but Reluctant to Provide Military Aid: In Russia, Anti-Western Views Support for Putin Surge". *Pew Research Center*. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/06/10/nato-publics-blame-russia-for-ukrainian-crisis-but-reluctant-to-provide-military-aid/>.

<sup>80</sup> Kofman, Michael. "The Moscow School of Hard Knocks: Key Pillars of Russian Strategy". *War on the Rocks*. January 17, 2017. <https://warontherocks.com/2017/01/the-moscow-school-of-hard-knocks-key-pillars-of-russian-strategy/>.

response. If implemented correctly, Russia could try to intervene and destabilize one of these Baltic states through non-conventional means.

### *Concluding Remarks*

The analysis above shows the lessons learned from analyzing Russia's actions in Georgia and Ukraine. The similarities and difference described could be a harbinger for Estonia and Latvia's national security. Sharing a border with Russia would make it easier and less expensive for the Kremlin to develop and engage in an intervention. If Russia were to engage or support any destabilizing movements in these countries, the Kremlin has shown brashness and capability of using international agreements to justify its actions. In addition, Russia seems to engage in areas where governments are allegedly suppressing the rights and ignoring the well-being of Russian compatriots abroad. Estonia and Latvia's large Russian-speaking population could create the necessary "window of opportunity" for the Kremlin to intervene. Finally, Russia's increased use of non-conventional warfare could increase the likelihood of interfering in a NATO member state, as this would decrease the likelihood of a NATO response due to transparency issues. However, before Russia would take the risk of interfering in a NATO state, there would have to be a "window of opportunity". The next section analyzes the demographics in Estonia and Latvia to assess if Russia would be able to create a reason or motivation in future endeavors.

## CHAPTER II

### COULD THE BALTICS BE RUSSIA'S NEXT TARGET?

Since the annexation of the Crimea, analysts have questioned if the Baltic states could be Putin's next target, specifically Estonia and Latvia.<sup>81</sup> There are several reasons why analysts wonder if the Baltic states could be threatened. First, like Ukraine and Georgia, these states were part of the U.S.S.R, though the United States never officially recognized their annexation.<sup>82</sup> If Putin's goal is to expand Russia's borders to incorporate former republics or support an opposition movement to bring instability to the region, these states could be a viable target. Second, the Baltic's bordering location could make any military action on the ground less expensive and thus more likely than an intervention further west. Third, there is a large Russian-speaking minority population in both states.

Although military action in Georgia and Ukraine was undoubtedly audacious, engaging in conventional military action in a NATO member state would be a sharp escalation in Russian foreign policy behavior. If using the previous interventions as a baseline to predict future Russian behavior, the decision to intervene would likely take place under a specific condition. This means, there would be a sizeable Russian-speaking population in a bordering nation that the Kremlin could call "compatriots" and accusations from the Kremlin that the Baltic governments are violating the rights of these individuals. This section discusses the distribution of Russian and Baltic language speakers in Estonia

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<sup>81</sup> Carpenter, Ted. "Are the Baltic States Next?". *The National Interest*. March 24, 2014. <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/are-the-baltic-states-next-10103>.

<sup>82</sup> Dahlburg, John-Thor, Tyler Marshall. "Independence for Baltic States : Freedom: Moscow Formally Recognizes Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, Ending Half a Century of Control. Soviets to Begin Talks Soon on New Relationships with the Three Nations." *LA Times Online*. September 7, 1991. [http://articles.latimes.com/1991-09-07/news/mn-1530\\_1\\_baltic-states](http://articles.latimes.com/1991-09-07/news/mn-1530_1_baltic-states).

and Latvia and examines Russia's humanitarian criticism that Baltic legislations is subjecting minority Russian speakers to harsher living conditions.

*Russian Speakers in the Baltics: The Window of Opportunity*

After their incorporation into the Soviet Union, the Baltic states experienced an influx of Russian speakers. The Soviets also implemented a strict *russification* policy that required residents to learn and use Russian, the official language of the U.S.S.R., in their daily life.<sup>83</sup> After the fall of the Soviet Union, some ethnic Russians returned to the Russian Federation, but many remained.<sup>84</sup> From 1989 to 2011, the percentage of citizens identified as ethnic Russians in Latvia decreased from 34% to 27% and in Estonia decreased from 30% to 25%.<sup>85</sup> As seen below, the percentage of individuals that are considered Russian speakers in both states is slightly higher than these numbers. There are several reasons to explain this difference. First, these statistics represent those who identify as ethnic Russians based on nationality. There could be some citizens who identify Russian as their mother tongue, but who identify with a different nationality. Second, both states have a percentage of the population considered "stateless", defined by the UN as individuals who reside outside of their own country, but are not able to acquire citizenship in another, either by

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<sup>83</sup> Human Rights Without Frontiers. "Citizenship and Language Rights of Russian-speaking Minorities in Baltic States". *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe*. September 29, 2014. Web. <http://www.osce.org/odihr/124483>.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> "Population Census 1989 – Latvia". *Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia*. 1989. [http://catalog.ihsn.org/index.php/catalog/3651/overview#page=data\\_collection&tab=study-desc](http://catalog.ihsn.org/index.php/catalog/3651/overview#page=data_collection&tab=study-desc). 30; "Population of Estonia by Population Censuses". *Statistical Office of Estonia*. 1997. <https://www.stat.ee/26383>. 18; "2011 Population and Housing Censuses in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania". *Statistical Office of Estonia, Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia and Statistics Lithuania*. May, 2015. <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/services-portlet/pub-edition-file?id=19698>. 26.

choice or bureaucratic measures.<sup>86</sup> In Latvia, these individuals are titled “non-citizens” and in Estonia “persons with undetermined citizenship.”<sup>87</sup> It is not clear if these populations were included in recent statistics reporting on the number of Russian speakers in Estonia and Latvia.

The number of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers could play an important role in Russia’s decision on engaging in a conflict with Estonia or Latvia in the future. Not only could the Kremlin label these individuals as compatriots, but also these communities might feel more connected to Russian culture because of their heritage or language background. It is important to note the number of ethnic Russians in both countries, but also important to reiterate that Russia considers any Russian-speaking person as a compatriot, making the level of Russian speakers more important to the Kremlin than only those with Russian ethnicity. If the Kremlin were to implement any political or military destabilization strategy, Russian-speaking communities would likely serve as the hot spots for building a support base for the Kremlin.

Available data shows the distribution of Russian speakers to Baltic language speakers is comparable to the distribution between Russian speakers and Ukrainian speakers in Ukraine. The analysis below shows the similarity between these distributions to draw a parallel between the demographics in these Baltic states and Ukraine. Comparing the number of Russian speakers in Georgia’s South Ossetian and Abkhazian regions is not

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<sup>86</sup> “Ending Statelessness”. *The UN Refugee Agency*. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c155.html>.

<sup>87</sup> “Basic facts about citizenship and language policy of Latvia and some sensitive history-related issues”. *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia*. December 11, 2015. <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/policy/society-integration/citizenship-in-latvia/citizenship-policy-in-latvia/basic-facts-about-citizenship-and-language-policy-of-latvia-and-some-sensitive-history-related-issues>; “Citizenship and Migration”. *The Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Estonia*. <https://www.siseministerium.ee/en/activities/citizenship-and-migration>.

as useful because Russia did not use “language” as an indicator of a compatriot. As mentioned earlier, the Kremlin issued passports to members in these communities, claimed these individuals as compatriots after its passportization campaign and used documentation as an indicator rather than language spoken at home. Therefore, Georgia has been omitted from the comparative analysis below.

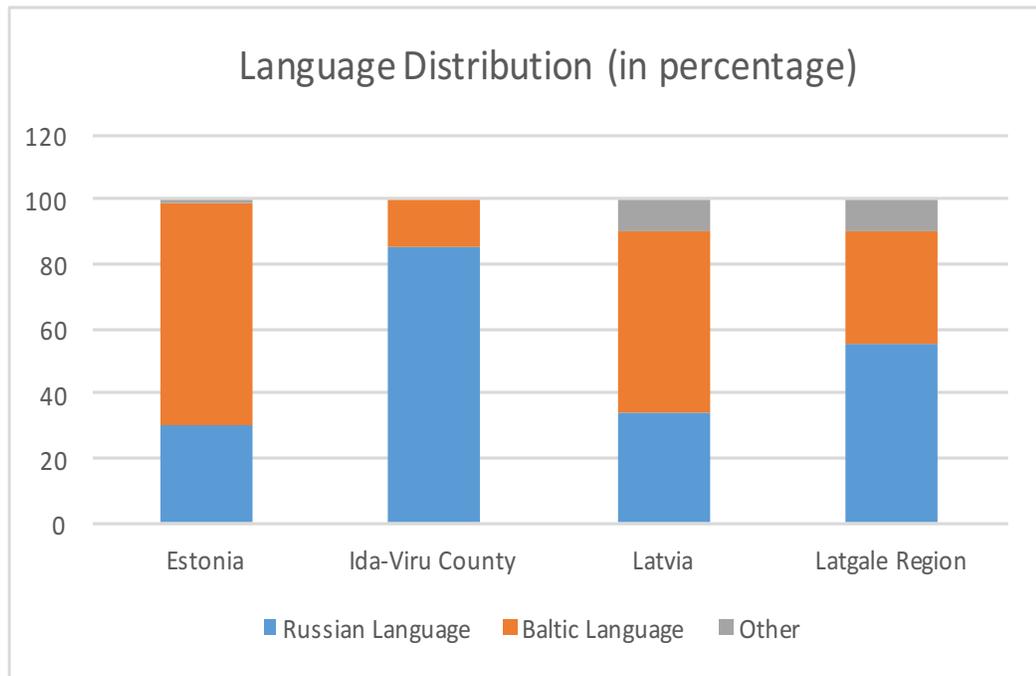


Figure 1: Data showing the language distribution of Russian speakers in Estonia and Latvia and their respective regions with a large Russian-speaking population, Ida-Viru County in Estonia and the Latgale Region in Latvia. Statistics were acquired from the official databank for the Statistics of Estonia and the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia.

Though neither surpassing nor matching the amount of Baltic speakers, Latvia and Estonia’s Russian-speaking population is still significant. As seen in Figure 1, Russian speakers account for 30% of the population in Estonia, whereas Estonian speakers account

for 69% of the population.<sup>88</sup> In Latvia, the distribution of Russian to Latvian speakers is slightly less extreme, with 34% of the population identifying as Russian speakers and 56% of the population identifying as Latvian speakers.<sup>89</sup> These statistics are similar to Ukraine's, where 29% of the total population consider Russian to be their mother tongue and about 68% percent consider Ukrainian.<sup>90</sup> The comparable levels of Russian speakers between these three countries and their history as former Soviet republics suggests that Russia might see these Baltic states as a security interest. This would increase the likelihood of future Russian interference, either through conventional or non-conventional means.

Though a minority population, there are areas in Estonia and Latvia where many residents consider Russian as their native language. These areas also share a border with Russia. In Estonia's northeastern region, over 80% of citizens living in Ida-Viru county are Russian speakers.<sup>91</sup> In Narva, Ida-Viru's major city, over 80% of residents are Russian speakers.<sup>92</sup> Though less severe, the Latgale region in south-eastern Latvia has a similar trend, with 55% of the population labeling Russian as their mother tongue and only 35% labeling Latvian.<sup>93</sup> However, Latgale's major city, Daugavpils, has a larger majority of

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<sup>88</sup> "Estonia". *The World Factbook*.

<sup>89</sup> "Latvia". *The World Factbook*. Central Intelligence Agency. 2011.  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/lg.html>.

<sup>90</sup> "Ukraine". *The World Factbook*. Central Intelligence Agency. 2001.  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html>.

<sup>91</sup> *Database: Population by Ethnic Nationality, Mother Tongue and Citizenship*. Statistics of Estonia. 2017.  
[http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/dialog/varval.asp?ma=PC225&ti=POPULATION+BY+ETHNIC+NATIONALITY%2C+MOTHER+TONGUE+AND+CITIZENSHIP&path=../I\\_databas/Population\\_census/phc2000/08ethnic\\_nationality\\_mother\\_tongue\\_command\\_of\\_foreign\\_languages/&search=LANGUAGE&lang=1](http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/dialog/varval.asp?ma=PC225&ti=POPULATION+BY+ETHNIC+NATIONALITY%2C+MOTHER+TONGUE+AND+CITIZENSHIP&path=../I_databas/Population_census/phc2000/08ethnic_nationality_mother_tongue_command_of_foreign_languages/&search=LANGUAGE&lang=1).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

Russian speakers at 79%.<sup>94</sup> The Kremlin might hope to exploit this portion of the population to pursue a political objective.

	<b>Mother Tongue: Russian</b>	<b>Mother Tongue: Ukrainian</b>
The Autonomous Republic of Crimea	77%	10%
Luhansk	69%	30%
Donetsk	75%	24%

Figure 2: Data showing the distribution of Russian speakers to Ukrainian speakers in Ukraine’s conflict areas. Data was acquired from Ukrainian’s official databank from the State Committee of Statistics.

A comparison of recent government censuses reveals a similar distribution of Russian speakers to state-language speakers in Ukraine.<sup>95</sup> The 2001 government census shows 90% of the population in Crimea were considered Russian speakers.<sup>96</sup> Luhansk and Donetsk also recorded a high percentage of Russian speakers, 69% and 75% respectively.<sup>97</sup> This similarity could lead the Kremlin to believe that an intervention in Latvia or Estonia could be as successful as it was Ukraine. If the ratio of Russian speaker to non-Russian

<sup>93</sup> *Population and Housing Census: Language Used at Home*. Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. 2011. [http://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/publikacijas/2015/Nr%2012%20Latvijas%202011.gada%20Tautas%20skaitisanas%20rezultati\\_Results%20of%20the%202011%20Population%20and%20housing%20census%20in%20Latvia%20%2815\\_00%29\\_LV\\_EN.pdf](http://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/publikacijas/2015/Nr%2012%20Latvijas%202011.gada%20Tautas%20skaitisanas%20rezultati_Results%20of%20the%202011%20Population%20and%20housing%20census%20in%20Latvia%20%2815_00%29_LV_EN.pdf).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> State Statistics Service of Ukraine. *Population Census: Distribution of the Population by Native Language*. State Statistics Service of Ukraine. May 5, 2001. [http://database.ukrcensus.gov.ua/MULT/Database/Census/databasetree\\_en.asp](http://database.ukrcensus.gov.ua/MULT/Database/Census/databasetree_en.asp).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

speaker is a factor in Russia's decision-making process for engagement, Estonia and Latvia's similar numbers to Ukraine's suggest that these populations could create a "window of opportunity" for Russian intervention. If the first step is to identify a sizeable Russian-speaking population, the next step is to assess if these populations are subjected to government discrimination. Under this condition, the Kremlin could justify future military engagement in the name of humanitarian principles, like it did in Georgia, or support an opposition movement, like it continues to do in Ukraine.

### *The Humanitarian Argument*

The Russian-speaking communities in Estonia and Latvia have caught the attention of the Kremlin, whose foreign policy agenda includes protecting the interest of the international Russian-speaking community and "compatriots" abroad.<sup>98</sup> As seen in Georgia and Ukraine, Russia uses its self-declared obligation to protect Russian compatriots abroad to interfere in sovereign nations.<sup>99</sup> If desired, Russia could attempt to create a pro-Russian or, at least, an anti-government movement by exploiting the hardships allegedly hurting Russian-speaking communities in Estonia and Latvia. Ida-Viru County and Latgale would be prime targets for such a campaign, as both areas share a border with Russia and have a large Russian-speaking population.

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<sup>98</sup> "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation". *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*.

<sup>99</sup> Zakem, Vera and Paul J. Saunders. "How Russia Views Its 'Compatriots' in the Near Abroad". *The National Interest*. March 17, 2016. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-russia-views-its-compatriots-the-near-abroad-15516>.

Russian officials have already been voicing concern for the protection of Russian speakers in Estonia and Latvia. Though acknowledging that states have the right to govern as they see fit, Russia has also argued that Estonian and Latvian legislation has indirectly discriminated against Russian speakers.<sup>100</sup> These claims largely focus on government policies that the Kremlin argues has limited Russian speakers' access to equal opportunity and forces many to be labeled as "non-citizens."<sup>101</sup> This section uses demographic data and international reports to assess Russia's argument on discrimination.

### *Factor 1: The Quality of Life in Minority Communities*

The Kremlin could use the hardships faced by Russian-speaking communities to justify any future actions in the Baltics. Government statistics from Estonia and Latvia report higher levels of poverty and unemployment in Ida-Viru and Latgale, in comparison to national levels, suggesting an economic disparity between Russian speakers and the majority population (Figure 3 & 4). Statistics show that areas with a large Russian-speaking population suffer from higher levels of unemployment.<sup>102</sup> From Estonia and Latvia's most recent census in 2011, Ida-Viru County and the Latgale region recorded the highest levels

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<sup>100</sup> "Statement by Konstantin Dolgov, Russian Foreign Ministry's Special Representative for Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, at PACE International Conference 'Human Rights and Foreign Policy'". *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*. December 17, 2012. [http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/130150](http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/130150).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.:

<sup>102</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (1). *ECRI Report on Latvia: Fourth Monitoring Cycle*. Council of Europe. February 21, 2012. <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Latvia/LVA-CbC-IV-2012-003-ENG.pdf>; European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (3). *ECRI Report on Estonia: Fifth Monitoring Cycle*. Council of Europe. October 13, 2015. <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Estonia/EST-CbC-V-2015-036-ENG.pdf>.

of unemployment rates and at-risk-poverty rates.<sup>103</sup> Both states have experienced a reduction in unemployment rates since this census, yet, Ida-Viru County and Latgale's statistics have recorded the least improvement. For example, in 2016, Estonia recorded a country unemployment rate of 6.8, down from 12.3 in 2011, with Ida-Viru County still recording the highest rate at 13.5, followed by Polva County at 10.2 (Figure 3).<sup>104</sup> In the same year, Latvia also recorded a lower country unemployment rate of 9.9, down from 16.5 in 2011, but Latgale's rate decreased by only 1% (Figure 3).<sup>105</sup>

These statistics suggest that regions with a large Russian-speaking population struggle economically more than the Baltic majority population. Reasons for high unemployment could be environmental. For example, less developed regions could experience higher unemployment rates because of limited employment opportunities in comparison to the population number. In this case, one would expect higher unemployment rates regardless of the number of Russian speakers. Even areas with a Baltic language-speaking majority would struggle with employment. However, government policies could also play a role. Both Estonia and Latvia have language policies that could restrict Russian speakers' access to employment, thereby contributing to the higher unemployment rates in Ida-Viru and Latgale.

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<sup>103</sup> *2011 Population Census of Estonia*. Statistics of Estonia. 2011. <http://www.stat.ee/phc2011.;> *2011 Population and Housing Census of Latvia*. Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. 2011. [http://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/publikacijas/2015/Nr%2012%20Latvijas%202011.gada%20Tautas%20skaitisanas%20rezultati\\_Results%20of%20the%202011%20Population%20and%20housing%20census%20in%20Latvia%20%2815\\_00%29\\_LV\\_EN.pdf](http://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/publikacijas/2015/Nr%2012%20Latvijas%202011.gada%20Tautas%20skaitisanas%20rezultati_Results%20of%20the%202011%20Population%20and%20housing%20census%20in%20Latvia%20%2815_00%29_LV_EN.pdf).

<sup>104</sup> *2011 Population Census of Estonia*. Statistics of Estonia

<sup>105</sup> *2011 Population and Housing Census of Latvia*. Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia.

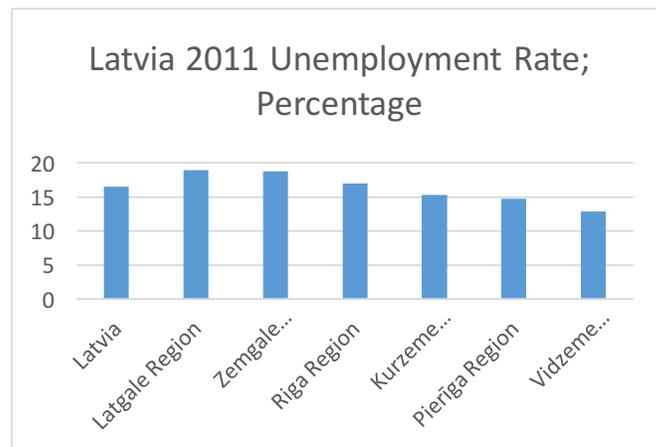
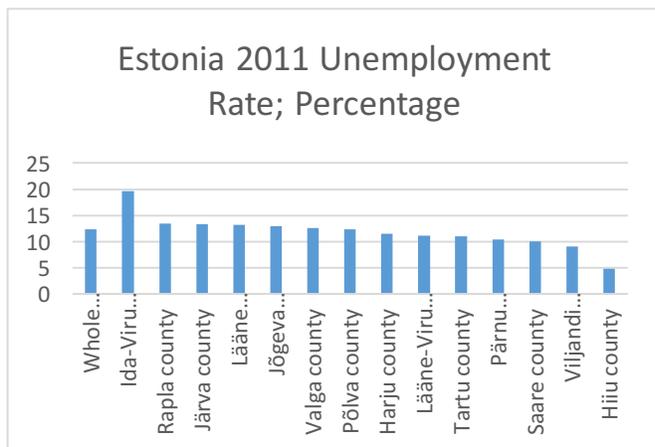


Figure 3: Data from 2011 Census of Estonia and Latvia acquired from official databank of the Statistics of Estonia and Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia.

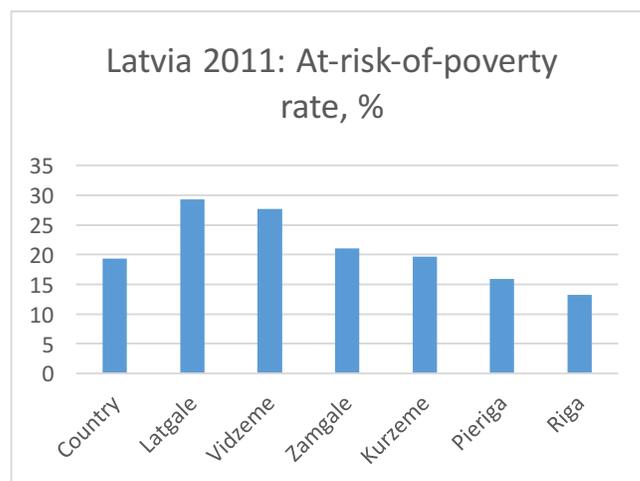
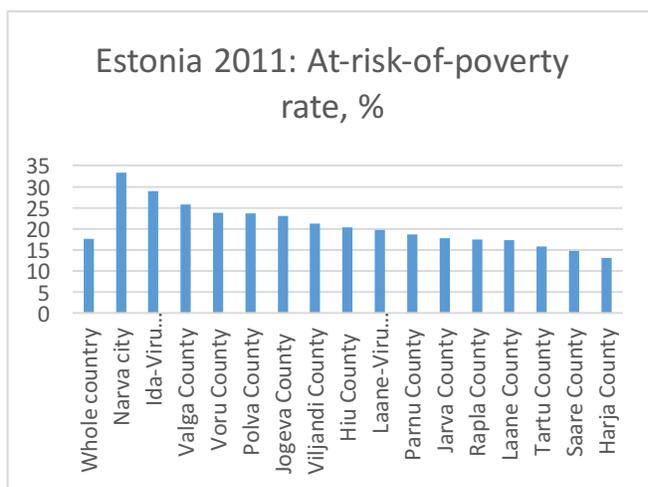


Figure 4: Data from 2011 Census of Estonia and Latvia acquired from official databank of the Statistics of Estonia and Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia.

According to Estonia's Language Act, all employees in state agencies, local governments, legal positions, and organizations that serve the "public interest" are required to show an advanced level of Estonian for employment.<sup>106</sup> Employees are required to demonstrate their advanced proficiency by passing a language exam.<sup>107</sup> Likewise, Latvia's Language Law also requires an advanced level of Latvian in government or partially government positions and in a private institution that offers a public service.<sup>108</sup> These requirements might limit employment options for Russian speakers, who do not meet the government's level of advanced proficiency. Using Russian could prevent citizens from finding employment or put them at risk for termination if they do not use the state language at their job.

In response to Russia's allegations, some Baltic officials have claimed that the well-being of minorities are a national concern.<sup>109</sup> Legislation reflects these governments' attempts to tackle discrimination. In 2004, Latvia passed the Labor Law, which prohibited discrimination or unfair treatment based on gender, race, color, age, disability, religion, and national or social origin.<sup>110</sup> Estonia passed a similar law, titled the Equal Treatment

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<sup>106</sup> *Language Act of 2011*. Republic of Estonia. *Riigi Teataja*. February 23, 2011. <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/506112013016/consolide>. Art. 23 & 24.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*: Art. 25 & 26.

<sup>108</sup> *Official Language Law*. Republic of Latvia. *Saeima*. December 21, 1999. <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UNTC/UNPAN018409.pdf>. Art. 6

<sup>109</sup> "Paet: Protection of Ethnic Minorities and Advancement of Their Cultures Inherent in Estonia". *Republic of Estonia Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. March 4, 2009. <http://www.vm.ee/en/news/paet-protection-ethnic-minorities-and-advancement-their-cultures-inherent-estonia>.

<sup>110</sup> Kehris, Ilze Brands. *Development of anti-discrimination legislation and practice in Latvia: EU accession and remaining challenges*. Latvian Centre for Human Rights. September, 2008. Web. 11.

Act, in 2008, that sought to “ensure the protection of persons against discrimination” on similar factors to the Latvian law.<sup>111</sup> However, language, which the European Union considers a form of “indirect ethnic discrimination”, is not included in either pieces of legislation.<sup>112</sup> According to Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, “language,” is considered grounds for discrimination in addition to nationality and ethnic origin.<sup>113</sup> Though one could argue that discrimination based on language is implied through the inclusion of ethnic or national origin, it is very plausible that these governments purposefully omitted language as a factor of discrimination. If Estonia or Latvia had truly wanted to ensure that its new legislation abided by all anti-discrimination laws in the European Union, “language” would have been established as grounds for discrimination.

Recent reports from the Council of Europe’s European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) identified Estonia and Latvia’s language policies as being a likely barrier against employment opportunities. The 2012 report on Latvia noted the government’s strict implementation of the Language Law for employment, requiring advanced proficiency in both the public and private sector.<sup>114</sup> This could deter Russian speakers from obtaining employment.<sup>115</sup> Commenting that legislation aiming to protect a

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<sup>111</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (3). *ECRI Report on Estonia: Fifth Monitoring Cycle*. Council of Europe.

<sup>112</sup> Kehris, Ilze Brands. 5.

<sup>113</sup> *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*. The European Union. *Official Journal of the European Communities*. December 12, 2000. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf).

<sup>114</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (1). *ECRI Report on Latvia: Fourth Monitoring Cycle*. Council of Europe.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*.

state language is legitimate and does not inherently lead to discrimination, the report also notes that legislation could lead to indirect discrimination when strictly implemented in an unnecessary environment.<sup>116</sup> For example, in areas with a Russian-speaking majority, it could be beneficial to employ individuals who have a strong grasp on the Russian language, especially in the public sector. This skill could help explain laws or public services to the individuals who have a low level of Latvian proficiency. For this reason, ECRI has recommended to “take all necessary measures to ensure a balanced implementation of the state’s Language Law.”<sup>117</sup> Flexibility in its implementation could actually be in the public’s interest.

ECRI’s report on Estonia commented on similar concerns on indirect discrimination. The report noted that areas with a Russian-speaking majority are less economically developed and experience higher levels of unemployment.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, there is little indication that the government is developing a solution to this problem, as there is not any system to evaluate or monitor levels of equality in the country that could be used for policy development.<sup>119</sup> To tackle this problem, ECRI suggests evaluating the implementation of the Language Act in Russian-speaking areas to identify if the legislation allows for indirect discrimination against non-Estonian speakers.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (3). ECRI Report on Estonia: Fifth Monitoring Cycle. Council of Europe.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.: 10.

Both of the most recent ECRI reports commented on the economic disadvantages of Russian speaking communities in Estonia and Latvia. ECRI recommends the Estonian government evaluating the effects of its legislation and recommends the Latvian authorities to enforce the state language policy only when there is a “legitimate public interest” and allow more flexibility in areas with a non-Latvian speaking majority.<sup>121</sup> Such recommendations reveal the Council of Europe’s concern that these language policies are contributing to the disparity in unemployment levels, disadvantaging Russian speakers and other minority communities.

Although higher unemployment rates likely generate higher rates of poverty, problems with state pensions could also be a factor. Again, this problem has affected former U.S.S.R citizens more than ethnic Latvians and Estonians. According to Estonia’s State Pension Insurance Act and Latvia’s Law on Pensions, individuals are eligible for old-age pension only if they have worked in the country for at least fifteen years.<sup>122</sup> This means, if an individual retired after 15 years of working in Estonia or Latvia, but had an additional 15 years of work experience in a different Soviet republic, these years would not be counted towards the calculation of a pensioner’s monthly payment.

Latvia and Estonia’s new pension policies left many older adults at a disadvantage, especially transplanted ethnic Russians. Any previous Soviet work experience in a different republic would not apply towards their work history, consequently lowering their monthly pension payment. Though this disadvantage is not permanent, it could still effect today’s

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<sup>121</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (3). 23.; European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (1). 22.

<sup>122</sup> *State Pension Insurance Act*. Republic of Estonia. *Riigi Teataja*. January 1, 2002. <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/516012017008/consolide>. Chapter 8(27); *On State Pensions*. Republic of Latvia. *Saeima*. November 23, 1995. Web.

older population. For example, an 80-year-old pensioner was 56 when the Soviet Union dissolved. If that individual had worked in the Soviet Union since the age of 22, but only Estonia or Latvia since the age of 42, the first 20 years did not apply towards their pension.

Statistics do not show how this effects specifically ethnic Russians in comparison to the majority population. However, it is important to note that Ida-Viru County, where about 73% of residents are ethnic Russians, has recorded the second lowest monthly payment in the country over the last five years.<sup>123</sup> This suggests that ethnic Russians retiring in Estonia might be receiving lower pension payments than the ethnic Estonians. Unfortunately, Latvia does not provide pension statistics as detailed as Estonia. However, considering the pension laws are similar, one can assume a similar disparity is present.

Russian speakers in Latvia and Estonia are struggling more than the rest of the ethnic population. As described above, language policies, a lack of legal protection against language discrimination, and each states' pension system disadvantages non-Baltic language speakers. The above statistics from Latvian and Estonian databanks corroborate the Kremlin's allegations that these governments are indirectly withholding the Russian-speaking community from enjoying equal opportunities in comparison to the majority population. Though the policies and social institutions do not specifically target Russian speakers, the rules and regulations subsequently disadvantage minority communities, particularly ethnic Russians.

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<sup>123</sup> "Population by Sex, Ethnic Nationality and County". *Statistics of Estonia Database*. <http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/Dialog/varval.asp?ma=PO0222&lang=1>; "Monthly Average Pension: County and Year". *Statistics of Estonia Database*. <http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/Dialog/Saveshow.asp>.

## *Factor 2: The Issue of Statelessness*

In addition to economic disadvantages, Russia also claims that the Baltic governments' are denying former Soviet citizens, many who are Russian speakers, the right to nationality, forcing these individuals to live as "stateless."<sup>124</sup> Recent reports estimate that 6% of Estonia's population and about 12% of Latvia's are currently considered stateless.<sup>125</sup> The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has argued that these Russian speakers are denied political and socio-economic rights because of their "non-citizen" status.<sup>126</sup> The ministry has also accused Baltic authorities of ignoring recommendations from international organizations to confront the issue of statelessness, thereby explicitly failing to protect the human rights of Russian speakers.<sup>127</sup> Again, the Kremlin could use this issue as a foreign policy tool. For example, any future Russian intervention into a region with a Russian-speaking majority could be justified in the name of protecting these citizens against government discrimination.

Statelessness became a contentious issue in the Baltic region after the fall of the Soviet Union. Under Estonia and Latvia's new citizenship, individuals who could show ethnic origin to the titular nation automatically received citizenship.<sup>128</sup> Others could choose

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<sup>124</sup> "Statement by Konstantin Dolgov, Russian Foreign Ministry's Special Representative for Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, at PACE International Conference 'Human Rights and Foreign Policy'". *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*.

<sup>125</sup> "Basic facts about citizenship and language policy of Latvia and some sensitive history-related issues". *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia*.; Griffiths, Helen. "It's Time to End Child Statelessness in Estonia". *Human Rights Watch*. January 17, 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/01/17/its-time-end-child-statelessness-estonia>.

<sup>126</sup> "Россия и проблематика обеспечения прав человека в государствах мира". *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*. March 9, 2016. <http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/rossia-i-problematika-obespecenia-prav-celoveka-v-gosudarstvah-mira>.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.:

to apply for Russian citizenship or become naturalized citizens.<sup>129</sup> If choosing the latter, individuals must pass a language exam, demonstrating an advanced fluency in the state language.<sup>130</sup> Those who decided not to apply for any citizenship, Russian or Baltic, or applied for naturalized citizenship, but failed to pass the exam, were labeled as “non-citizens,” “stateless,” or an “alien”.<sup>131</sup> Statements from the Foreign Ministry convey the Kremlin’s objection to this process, arguing that the local governments do not provide affordable access to state language education and that the exam is too difficult for Russian speakers, especially elderly learners.<sup>132</sup>

Non-citizens are not allowed to exercise the same rights as citizens, even though many have lived in the Baltics since the Soviet occupation. For example, Latvian non-citizens cannot vote in elections, denying these individuals the right to influence the political environment in their own community.<sup>133</sup> On the other hand, Estonians holding a gray “alien” passport, considered legal documentation for non-citizens, can vote in local elections, but are not allowed to join any political parties.<sup>134</sup> Estonian NGO’s that focus on

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<sup>128</sup> *Citizenship Act*. Government of Estonia. <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/512022015001/consolide>; Law “On the Status of Former USSR Citizens Who Are Not Citizens of Latvia of Any Other State”. Government of Latvia. <http://www.humanrights.lv/doc/latlik/noncit.htm>.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.:

<sup>132</sup> “Statement by Konstantin Dolgov, Russian Foreign Ministry's Special Representative for Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, at PACE International Conference ‘Human Rights and Foreign Policy’”. *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*.

<sup>133</sup> Brown, Jonathan. “Living in Limbo: Latvia's “non-citizen” policy leaves thousands feeling stateless”. *Vice News*. February 15, 2017. <https://news.vice.com/story/latvias-non-citizen-policy-leaves-thousands-feeling-stateless>.

<sup>134</sup> Vero, Tacita. “The Gray Zone: With “gray passports,” many ethnic Russians in Estonia live in a state of legal limbo”. *Slate Magazine Online*. March 13, 2017.

the rights of non-Estonian speakers argue that restricting the rights of stateless persons is creating an environment of social marginalization and disconnect because of this political isolation.<sup>135</sup>

Reports from the United Nations Human Rights Council shows the international community's concern about the status of these stateless individuals. Regarding Estonia, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights commended the government for making some strides in combatting the problem with statelessness by easing requirements for children born in Estonia to stateless parents and exempting those 65 and older from passing the language exam to qualify for naturalization.<sup>136</sup> However, the council also noted the recent decrease of citizens seeking naturalization, possibly because the language exam is too difficult.<sup>137</sup> In another statement, the Latvian Human Rights Council for the UN lauded the Latvian government after easing regulations for children to acquire citizenship, but also noticed other amendments to its citizenship law that allowed the government to deny applicants citizenship without judicial review on "vague security grounds."<sup>138</sup> The council also critiqued the continued restriction of rights to non-citizens, such as the right to vote, create political parties and restricted access to work or some pensions.<sup>139</sup>

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[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/roads/2017/03/many\\_ethnic\\_russians\\_in\\_estonia\\_have\\_grey\\_passports\\_live\\_in\\_legal\\_limbo.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/roads/2017/03/many_ethnic_russians_in_estonia_have_grey_passports_live_in_legal_limbo.html).

<sup>135</sup> Estonian Legal Information Centre for Human Rights. "National minorities in Estonia: risk of poverty and social marginalisation". *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe*. September 29, 2014. <http://www.osce.org/odihr/124459>.

<sup>136</sup> United Nations, Human Rights Council (1). "Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Twenty-Fourth Session, Estonia". January, 2016. Web. 12.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> United Nations, Human Rights Council (2). "Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Twenty-Fourth Session, Latvia". January, 2016. Web. 9.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

Concerning these developments, the UN has recommended the Estonian and Latvian governments focus more attention on the problem of statelessness, but recommendations are broad. For example, to address this issue in Estonia, the council recommends that “Estonia facilitate the acquisition of Estonian citizenship by persons with the status of “non-citizens” and address obstacles encountered by applicants,” yet does not suggest specific methods to accomplish these goals.<sup>140</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that UN committees and councils have reported on the issue of statelessness with concern and offered recommendations indicate the humanitarian importance of this problem.

The barriers faced by non-citizens could contribute to an increased level of animosity towards the government and social marginalization. If stateless persons feel the government does not represent their well-being, these individuals might feel isolated from society and, subsequently, search for another community. Perhaps this sentiment is already developing. Recent analysis from the Baltic Institute of Social Sciences reported a drop in the number of Latvian non-citizens feeling a “sense of belonging” to Latvia.<sup>141</sup> If this trend continues, the subsequent national division could be dangerous for Estonia and Latvia’s national security. Labeling these governments as discriminatory, the Kremlin could inspire an opposition movement, hoping the movement will gain enough momentum to destabilize the governments. However, the success and level of impact would depend on unpredictable environmental factors. If the movement gained momentum, it could have a substantial

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<sup>140</sup> United Nations, Human Rights Council (1). 12.

<sup>141</sup> “Analysis of Integration of Latvian Non-Citizens”. *Baltic Institute of Social Sciences*. 2014. [http://www.biss.soc.lv/downloads/resources/nepilsoni/BISS\\_Noncitizens\\_2014.pdf](http://www.biss.soc.lv/downloads/resources/nepilsoni/BISS_Noncitizens_2014.pdf). 52.

impact on the stability of the domestic government. However, if authorities could quickly squash the movement, the impact would likely be minor.

### *Summary of Analysis*

Though there might not be an immediate threat of imminent conflict, analysts should not underestimate the Kremlin's potential for causing disruption in the Baltics because of the presence of a struggling Russian-speaking community. Russia's previous interventions have revealed the Kremlin's ability to take advantage of the current environment in a bordering nation for political gains. To date, this environment has included the exploitation of Russian speakers and compatriots facing government barriers for prosperity or discrimination. Estonia and Latvia's Russian-speaking regions facing disparate social and economic challenges could be the catalyst for Russian aggression.

Any conflict developments against Estonia or Latvia would involve the use of international treaties to justify Russian actions. For example, Russia could use the Helsinki Final Act or the UN's position on statelessness to justify any actions taken in the name of protecting the 12% of stateless persons in Latvia. Though the international community would likely reject and refute such claims, Russia's past behavior shows the Kremlin's disregard for international norms. Criticism against Russia's selective interpretations of international agreements has not stalled the Kremlin's actions in the past and, therefore, might not in the future.

Of course, the consequences of engaging with a NATO member state are higher than with non-NATO states. It is certainly true that had Georgia or Ukraine been NATO members, Russia might have decided to refrain from military engagement. However,

perhaps the higher stakes merely warrant a different strategy. Russia's adaptability in the Georgian and Ukrainian conflict might indicate the Kremlin's view of NATO as a barrier to overcome instead of a barrier to avoid. NATO, however, might not have completely prepared its members to confront a 21<sup>st</sup> century adversary that uses Russia's adaptable strategy.

**CHAPTER III**

**THE CONVENTIONAL STRENGTHS AND NON-CONVENTIONAL  
WEAKNESSES OF NATO**

Since its beginning, NATO and Russia have had a contentious relationship. In 1949, the United States and 11 western European countries came together to sign the North Atlantic Treaty, creating the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>142</sup> One of the objectives of NATO was to “keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.”<sup>143</sup> The North Atlantic Council (NAC) was created to act as the decision-making political body of the alliance, discussing security issues with all members as needed.<sup>144</sup> According to Article 4, a member can call the Parties together to discuss any security concerns or perceived threats from an outside state.<sup>145</sup> If all the members of the NAC feel it is necessary, the council can vote to invoke Article 5, the mutual defense clause of the North Atlantic Treaty.<sup>146</sup> It is this clause that is considered the greatest strength of the alliance, bringing great risk to any adversary willing to threaten the security of alliance members.

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<sup>142</sup> “Lord Ismay”. *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*. [http://nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified\\_137930.htm](http://nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_137930.htm).

<sup>143</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (1) “A Short History of NATO”. *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. [http://nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified\\_139339.htm](http://nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_139339.htm).

<sup>144</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (2). “North Atlantic Council”. *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_49763.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49763.htm).

<sup>145</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (3). “The Consultation Process and Article 4”. *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*. [http://www.nato.int/cps/ro/natohq/topics\\_49187.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/ro/natohq/topics_49187.htm).

<sup>146</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (4). “Collective Defence-Article 5”. *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*. *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*. [http://www.nato.int/cps/cn/natohq/topics\\_110496.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/cn/natohq/topics_110496.htm).

NATO has conducted seven rounds of enlargement, with the next ascension to include Montenegro scheduled for June 2017.<sup>147</sup> Estonia and Latvia joined NATO during the fifth round of enlargement in 2004. Russia has consistently objected to NATO enlargement, arguing that the alliance is a threat to Russian national security.<sup>148</sup> NATO, on the other hand, has maintained that the alliance's purpose is to "promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area" through its commitment to democracy and collective defence.<sup>149</sup> Russia's continued criticism of the alliance represents the Kremlin's suspicion of NATO.

Recent studies from the Center for Strategic and International Studies have claimed that the Kremlin's international political objective is to break the dominant influence of western institutions, such as NATO, to disrupt the international order and regain a regional position of power in the new status quo.<sup>150</sup> Discrediting NATO's commitment to mutual defense would be the ultimate victory in international politics for Russia. To accomplish this, the Kremlin could try to destabilize the national security of a NATO state. In this case, Estonia or Latvia would be a prime target because of their bordering geography with Russia.

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<sup>147</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (5). "Enlargement". *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*. [http://www.nato.int/cps/da/natohq/topics\\_49212.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/da/natohq/topics_49212.htm).

<sup>148</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (6). "NATO-Russia Relations: The Facts". *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_111767.htm#cl410](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111767.htm#cl410).

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Conley, Heather, and James Mina, Ruslan Stefanov, Martin Vladimirov. "The Kremlin Playbook: Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe". *Center for Strategic International Studies*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. IX-X.

### *Gains and Losses of a Baltic Intervention*

Though risky, there could be some benefits from interfering in one of the Baltic states. Scholars from the Carnegie Moscow Center have commented on the relationship between Putin's approval ratings and international interventions. Putin's popularity increased domestically after both the Georgia and Ukraine conflict, which could imply that the population approves of his international endeavors.<sup>151</sup> Recent polls from the independent polling organization Levada Center in 2015 reported that over 50% of those polled would either fully "want" or "probably want" Russia to expand its borders to incorporate Russian-speaking territories.<sup>152</sup> This means that the public might be in favor of a Russian intervention in a Russian-speaking region in the Baltics. Putin might try to use Russian foreign policy to increase domestic support during periods of Russian political instability or perhaps during the 2018 presidential elections.

There is an interesting discrepancy in the above-mentioned poll. Though 50% of those polled would "probably want" to incorporate Russian-speaking territories into Russia, only 15% considered annexation as an appropriate method to deal with states that are discriminating against Russian-speaking populations, even if it is the will of the territory.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, only 8% believed Russia should send in small military forces to protect these individuals.<sup>154</sup> Although many would likely favor expanding Russia's

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<sup>151</sup> Kolesnikov, Andrew. "Why Russians Say Yes". *Carnegie Moscow Center*. January 13, 2017. <http://carnegie.ru/2017/01/13/why-russians-say-yes-pub-67695>.

<sup>152</sup> Levada Center. "Russian Discrimination in the Post-Soviet Space". *Levada Center*. <http://www.levada.ru/en/2015/04/29/russian-discrimination-in-the-post-soviet-space/>.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

territory to include more Russian-speaking populations, it does not appear to be the country's preferred method for solving international humanitarian conflicts.

Interestingly, the Levada Center reported that 87% of the population supported the annexation of Crimea, a strange number considering how many responded negatively to using annexation to resolve humanitarian conflicts.<sup>155</sup> This inconsistency might further demonstrate the important role government can play in public opinion and support. A 2016 study by NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence analyzed online and social media to differentiate between the Russian and Ukrainian perspectives of the conflict in the Donbas (NATO StratCom 2016). Research found that Russia uses strategic linguistic framing, selective images, and trolls to “create a positive image of itself, justify its actions, support diplomatic activity and military actions.”<sup>156</sup> For example, an about 87% of comments found on pro-Russia media sources did not portray Russia's actions in Crimea as aggressive.<sup>157</sup> In contrast, 87% of comments on pro-Ukrainian media and 55% of comments from “balanced sources” viewed Russia's actions in Crimea as aggressive.<sup>158</sup> These statistics suggest a correlation between the way pro-Russian sources portray events and the effects it has on readers. Pro-Russian media, offering a stark alternative to western media, can effectively alter the perspective of its readers. Therefore, although the Levada Center's poll indicates that the population is not in favor of aggressive foreign policy, the

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<sup>155</sup> Nardelli, Alberto, Jennifer Rankin and George Arnett. “Vladimir Putin's Approval Rating at Record Levels”. *The Guardian*. July 23, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/datablog/2015/jul/23/vladimir-putins-approval-rating-at-record-levels>.

<sup>156</sup> NATO Stratcom Centre of Excellence. *Framing of the Ukraine–Russia Conflict in Online and Social Media*. Stratcom Publications, 2016: 13 & 29. <http://www.stratcomcoe.org/framing-ukraine-russia-conflict-online-and-social-media>.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

Russian government's strategic use of biased media has an effect on public opinion and support for the Kremlin.

Intervening in Latvia and Estonia would be riskier than Ukraine or Georgia because both are members of NATO. However, if Putin's objective is to destabilize or undermine western institutions, NATO states could be a target.<sup>159</sup> Putin has long objected to NATO expansion, labeling the alliance as a direct threat to Russian international security.<sup>160</sup> Many NATO officials have repeatedly disregarded Russia's claims that enlargement was aimed to target Russia, emphasizing that it is every sovereign country's right to seek membership into the alliance and that membership is not forced upon them by the West.<sup>161</sup> However, the prospects of destabilizing NATO, a perceived threat to Russian security, and increasing political support for the Kremlin might Russia to consider ways to interfere with NATO states.

Although there are advantages in possible Russian interference in Estonia and Latvia, there is also the risk of retaliation from NATO. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty represents the member states' commitment to mutual defense. If one member state was attacked, all other members are expected to respond. The concept of mutual defence was an important feature of deterring the threat of a Soviet invasion.<sup>162</sup> Yet the alliances commitment to mutual defence might be in jeopardy. Recent media coverage has expressed the United States' frustration with member states not adhering to their financial

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<sup>159</sup> Conley, Heather, and James Mina, Ruslan Stefanov, Martin Vladimirov. IX-X.

<sup>160</sup> Российская Федерация. "Военная доктрина Российской Федерации". December, 2014. <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf>. 5.

<sup>161</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (6). "NATO-Russia Relations: The Facts".

<sup>162</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (5). "Collective Defence-Article 5".

commitment, which includes contributing 2% of a state's national Gross Domestic Product to the alliance.<sup>163</sup> Although it is true that many states fall short of this threshold, Estonia has repeatedly met this requirement and Latvia is reportedly on target to as well.<sup>164</sup> Estonia and Latvia's deep commitment to fulfill their financial responsibilities likely reflect their belief in the alliance as well as their sense of national security risk, perhaps fearing Russian aggression. Although there have been questions of NATO's purpose and the commitment of its members, the Baltic states have been adhering to the alliance's principle objectives, making an allied response to a direct threat of their national security more likely than other states.

### *The Conventional Strengths and Weaknesses of NATO*

NATO's international military and the mutual defence clause are strengths of the alliance. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, NATO's military has engaged in multiple missions that have resulted in political transitions, with Kosovo (1999) being heavily disputed by the Russian government.<sup>165</sup> Interventions like the one in Kosovo demonstrate NATO's ability to change the political landscape in a sovereign state through military force. The political strength of the mutual defence clause was evident after the 9/11 attacks

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<sup>163</sup> Diamond, Jeremy. "Trump Scolds NATO Allies Over Defense Spending". May 25, 2017. *CNN Politics*. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/25/politics/trump-nato-financial-payments/index.html>.

<sup>164</sup> Pomorskie, Drawsko. "Back to Basics". *The Economist*. November 14, 2013. <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21589900-atlantic-alliance-wants-new-role-after-afghanistan-time-being-it-looking>.

<sup>165</sup> An example of Putin's opposition to NATO operations can be seen in his address to the State Duma after the Crimean referendum. "Address by President of the Russian Federation". *President of Russia*. March 18, 2014. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

on the United States, the only instance of the Allies invoking Article 5.<sup>166</sup> However, this was more a symbolic act of support for the United States to respond individually in self-defense, as NATO forces were not directly involved in the United States' response until later.<sup>167</sup>

Although NATO's powerful military and commitment to mutual defence are strengths of the North Atlantic Treaty, they can also be weaknesses. Two problems that could arise if NATO suddenly faced aggressive Russian actions are: a problem with accessibility and a problem with the consensus of members. The first problem concerns having immediate access to the appropriate military personnel and equipment for a defensive response. Although NATO's military includes high numbers of equipment and experienced personnel, it might not be accessible to defend a Baltic incursion. The second problem concerns the NAC's ability to reach a consensus on what constitutes an "armed attack" and what characterizes the appropriate response.

### *Problems with Accessibility*

NATO's defensive capability to stop a Russian Baltic invasion might be less effective than its previous endeavors. A 2016 report from the RAND Corporation examining war games from 2014 and 2015 concluded that Russia would need, at most, 60 hours to take over Tallinn and Riga because of advantages in accessibility due to geography (RAND 2016). For instance, from the Russian border, Tallinn is approximately 200km

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<sup>166</sup> The History Channel Online. "Reaction to 9/11". *The History Channel*. <http://www.history.com/topics/reaction-to-9-11>.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

away and Riga is roughly 210 km.<sup>168</sup> NATO forces entering from the Polish border would have to travel 600 km to Tallinn and 325km to Riga.<sup>169</sup> Moreover, NATO troops would have to cross the “Kaliningrad corridor” along Belarus and Russia, putting troops at risk of long-range artillery fire.<sup>170</sup> The natural geographic barriers greatly advantage Russia, who could quickly move into the Baltics to capture Tallinn and Riga before the Allies could send in help to defend them.

According to RAND, it would take several weeks for NATO or U.S. military reinforcements to arrive for Baltic support.<sup>171</sup> The issue of reinforcements is important because of the discrepancy in size and power of Baltic and Russian military forces. Most NATO forces in the region belong to the Baltics and are small light infantry battalions, which would have a difficult time defending Russia’s estimated 22 available battalions.<sup>172</sup> If left unchanged, the fate of the Baltic states could rely on the Kremlin’s decision to invade, which would be difficult to predict.

The RAND report also emphasized the difficult choices NATO would face under a Russian offensive attack: launch a risky counteroffensive that carries the risk of escalation, threaten Moscow with a “massive retaliation” of nuclear weapons, or concede to Russian occupation and possibly destroy the alliance altogether.<sup>173</sup> However, the authors posit that

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<sup>168</sup> Shlapak, David A. and Michael Johnson. “Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics”. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016. 3. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1253.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html).

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 7.

sending in three additional armed brigades could deter such an attack and that this expense would be a logical move.<sup>174</sup> The RAND report demonstrates that NATO's successful past might not indicate a successful future without some changes.

### *Problems with Consensus*

If confronted with Russian aggression, NATO might have a problem reaching a consensus on how to respond. Koremenos (2001) argues that larger numbers in institutions can make cooperation more difficult.<sup>175</sup> A problem with cooperation might stem from the framing of Article 5, which states that:

*“The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.”<sup>176</sup>*

An “armed attack” is not defined anywhere in the treaty and is not in the current NATO handbook of definitions. The most similar term available is “armed forces - an entire military forces of a nation.”<sup>177</sup> From this, perhaps an armed attack could be interpreted as

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>175</sup> Koremenos, Barbara, Charles Lipson, Duncan Snidal. “The Rational Design of International Institutions”. *International Organization*, Vol. 55, No. 4, The Rational Design of International Institutions (Autumn, 2001), pp. 761-799.

<sup>176</sup> North Atlantic Treaty art. 5, Apr. 4, 1949, 63 Stat. 2241, 34 U.N.T.S. 243.  
[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm).

<sup>177</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), European Union (EU), United Nations (UN). [Informal Interorganizational Military Glossary of Abbreviations, Terms and Definitions Related to Conflict Prevention and Defence and Related Security Capacity Building](http://www.cimic-coe.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/NATO-EU-UN-glossary-on-DCB-and-CP.pdf). February 13, 2015. <http://www.cimic-coe.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/NATO-EU-UN-glossary-on-DCB-and-CP.pdf>. 16.

any offensive action that threatens the sovereignty or territorial integrity of a member state. However, as mentioned earlier, part of Russia's operation in Crimea included a unit of unidentified armed men, which Putin claimed were "Crimean self-defense forces" storming the parliament building. If a similar event happened in a Russian-speaking region in the Baltics, Allies might disagree on whether it is necessary to risk further escalation for the actions of unmarked forces. Using a strategy of unmarked armed forces may delay a NATO response, which could carry drastic consequences.

If the members collectively decided to respond to an adversary, they might disagree on the method or proportion of the response. Article 5 states that members are expected to implement any response they "deem necessary", which could include the use of "armed force". Although all party members might agree to respond to an offensive attack, some might prefer responding through military actions while others could prefer implementing sanctions. Disagreements like these could weaken the alliance's ability to respond to an adversary.

There are several reasons why there could be a disagreement among NATO members. First, the NAC is a consensus decision-making institution with 28 current members. Large membership increases the risk of one country objecting, inhibiting the allies from agreeing on a response strategy. A 2008 questionnaire taken after Russia's actions in Georgia further demonstrates this risk. According to the report, 50% of the population in Italy and 35% in Germany would "strongly oppose" if Russia were to pursue a similar campaign in the Baltics.<sup>178</sup> For some states, the costs of retaliation for defending the Baltics might be too great. Considering the serious political consequences that would

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<sup>178</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee. "Towards the Next Defence and Security Review: Part Two-NATO". The Stationary Office Limited. London, 2014. Web.

come from fully conceding to Russia's behavior, member(s) might push for a smaller response, such as sanctions, in order to appear committed to the alliance. These methods may not be as effective in changing Russia's behavior. Russia's continued occupation in Crimea amidst ongoing Western sanctions displays the Kremlin's willingness to adjust its economy to compensate. Faced with additional sanctions, it is unclear if Russia would adhere to international demands.

### **The Non-Conventional Weaknesses of NATO**

Russia's ability to utilize non-conventional means of warfare could pose future challenges for NATO. Any problems with the unanimous consensus of members will likely be exacerbated with the increasing presence of non-conventional warfare tactics that decreases transparency in security issues. Some likely challenges will be managing cyber-attacks, information warfare, and confronting adversaries who hide behind a wall of plausible deniability.

#### *Cyber Warfare*

In 2007, NATO had its first experience dealing with a cyber-attack. During the spring, the Estonian government's decision to move a 1947 Soviet Bronze Soldier war memorial out of the center of Tallinn inspired protests from the Russian speaking community.<sup>179</sup> Though the statue represented years of suffering under Soviet occupation for ethnic Estonians, for ethnic Russians, it represented victory over fascism in WWII.<sup>180</sup> In August,

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<sup>179</sup> McGuinness, Damien. "How a Cyber Attack Transformed Estonia". *BBC News*. April 27, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/39655415>.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

a massive cyber-attack hurt the country's infrastructure. It blocked and took down online banking services, media outlets, and government websites and disseminated spam.<sup>181</sup> Although an anonymous Estonian official reported that evidence pointed to the Kremlin as the initiator, such as a Russian IP address identified as the source, there is no concrete evidence that could connect the attacks to the Russian government.<sup>182</sup> Estonia considered asking the Allies to invoke Article 5, but hesitated, fearing a lack of support from members.<sup>183</sup> At that time, the alliance had never confronted a cyber-adversary and a viable allied response was not clear.

Understanding the alliance's weakness in cyber-defence and the ubiquitous vulnerability of all members, NATO has dedicated more attention and resources to developing a defensive strategy for cyber-attacks. At the Lisbon Summit in 2010, NATO released a new handbook that identified cyber-attacks as an increasing threat to the international community and encouraged developments to enhance cyber security.<sup>184</sup> Effects of this recommendation came to fruition in 2014 with the creation of the NATO Industry Cyber Partnership (NICP), an institution aimed at strengthening cyber defence, and the signing of the Cyber Defence Pledge in 2016.<sup>185</sup> Additionally, as of 2014, "cyberspace" was added as a protected security domain within the alliance's objectives.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Rehman, Scheherazade. "Estonia's Lessons in Cyberwarfare". *U.S. News*. January 14, 2013. Web.

<sup>184</sup> NATO Strategic Concepts. Active Engagement, Modern Defence: Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty. NATO Graphics & Printing, Brussels, Belgium. November, 2010. 11 & 16.

<sup>185</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (7). "Cyber Defence Pledge". *NATO*. July 8, 2016. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133177.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133177.htm).

These recent institutional and policy developments demonstrate NATO's commitment to adapting to modern security challenges. Each of these developments aim to protect NATO members' infrastructure from a state-led cyberattack. For instance, NICP seeks to "improve sharing of expertise [and] information, including information on threats and vulnerabilities [to] raise awareness and improve the understanding of cyber risks."<sup>187</sup> However, future attacks may be state *encouraged*, but not state-led. For instance, studies on a 2008 cyberattack in Georgia by Deibert, Rohozinski, & Crete-Nishihata suggested the source of the attack could be either the Kremlin, a third party hired by the Kremlin, or Russian citizens who took government statements as a call to the public to implement a cyber-attack (Deibert, Rohozinski, & Crete-Nishihata 2012). Their study concluded that it was too difficult to determine the exact the source of the attacks because of problems with transparency.<sup>188</sup> If cyber warfare starts to drift away from the state to second or third party initiators, NATO will face challenges in any retaliating, such as being able to identify the source.

### *Information Warfare*

Where the goal of cyber warfare is often to harm a nation's infrastructure or computer networks, information warfare focuses on influencing the psychology of a nation.<sup>189</sup> During

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<sup>186</sup> NATO Industry Cyber Partnership. "Objectives and Principles". 2016.

<http://www.nicp.nato.int/objectives-and-principles/index.html>.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Deibert, Ronald J, Rafal Rohozinski, and Masashi Crete-Nishihata. "Cyclones in Cyberspace: Information Shaping and Denial in the 2008 Russia–Georgia War." *Security Dialogue* 43.1 (2012): 3-24. Web. *SAGE Complete*. 15-17.

<sup>189</sup> Giles, Keir. "The Next Phase of Russian Information Warfare". *NATO StratCom*. 2016. <http://www.stratcomcoe.org/next-phase-russian-information-warfare-keir-giles>.

the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union used disinformation campaigns to influence public opinion, which the Soviets characterized as dissemination of “false reports intended to mislead public opinion.”<sup>190</sup> The Soviets were particularly skillful at this strategy. In 1983, a pro-Soviet newspaper published an article citing an anonymous but “well-known” source that claimed the United States had created AIDS to use in biological weapons.<sup>191</sup> A newspaper in the Soviet Union ran the story in 1985 and by 1987, it is estimated that up to 50 countries had run the false story, showing how quickly disinformation can spread.<sup>192</sup>

Today, disinformation, often called “fake news” still plays a prominent role in politics with the same goal of affecting public opinion. President Putin has strategically returned a majority of Russia’s media back to state control, either directly or indirectly, through establishing pro-Kremlin CEOs, in its effort to control public opinion.<sup>193</sup> One strategy is to encourage the people to “question more” what they read in the media, offering the public an “alternative truth” from the Kremlin’s perspective that contradicts Western sources.<sup>194</sup> For example, the Russian government controlled TASS News Agency reported on NATO’s recent deployment of reinforcements in the Baltics as an offensive action, to

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<sup>190</sup> Taylor, Adam. “Before ‘fake news,’ there was Soviet ‘disinformation’”. *The Washington Post*. November 26, 2016. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/11/26/before-fake-news-there-was-soviet-disinformation/?utm\\_term=.eaada9bf7628](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/11/26/before-fake-news-there-was-soviet-disinformation/?utm_term=.eaada9bf7628).

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.:

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Dougherty, Jill. “How the Media Became one Putin’s Most Powerful Weapons”. *The Atlantic Online*. April 15, 2015. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/04/how-the-media-became-putins-most-powerful-weapon/391062/>.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

which Russia would respond to defend its border.<sup>195</sup> Conversely, Western sources described the deployment of additional troops as a defensive action in response to recent Russian aggression.<sup>196</sup> Arguably, either source could be a victim of misperception, as both NATO and Russia have historically viewed the other as the aggressor. In the end, the contradictory information waves could confuse the average reader, opening the possibility of inaccurately perceiving critical political developments.

If successfully implemented, disinformation campaigns could be particularly dangerous in a Russian-speaking region. This strategy could help create a “fifth column” opposition movement without the Russian government being directly involved. For example, in 2014, a Facebook page supporting the “Latgalian People’s Republic” suddenly appeared, providing a map of a potential breakaway region in Latvia.<sup>197</sup> Latvia’s Security Police could not identify any direct evidence to identify the source of the page, but have suggested that an “outsider” in Russia likely created it.<sup>198</sup> Though there have not been any active separatist movements, the creation of this site raises questions about how many people believed the story of the “Latgalian People’s Republic” or hoped it were true, especially in Latgale.

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<sup>195</sup> TASS Russian News Agency (1). “Press Review: NATO beefing up presence in the Baltics and Russia selling 12 companies”. *TASS Russian News Agency*. October 31, 2016. <http://tass.com/pressreview/909708>. TASS Russian News Agency (2). “NATO building up offensive armaments along border with Russia — General Staff”. *TASS Russian News Agency*. April, 26, 2017. <http://tass.com/defense/943317>.

<sup>196</sup> Schmitt, Eric. “U.S. Lending Support to Baltic States Fearing Russia”. *The New York Times*. January 1, 2017. [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/01/us/politics/us-baltic-russia.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/01/us/politics/us-baltic-russia.html?_r=0).

<sup>197</sup> Higgins, Andrew. “Latvian Region Has Distinct Identity, and Allure for Russia”. *The New York Times*. May 20, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/21/world/europe/latvian-region-has-distinct-identity-and-allure-for-russia.html>.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

Some may believe disinformation campaigns are ineffective because the fake stories are either too outrageous to believe or are ultimately disproven. However, some analysts argue that creating a believable false story that is never debunked might not be Russia's agenda. Unlike conventional warfare, which attacks the government and, in some cases, civilians, Russia uses the non-conventional disinformation tactic to attack the psychology of the population, causing doubt and suspicion of government institutions.<sup>199</sup> Over time, this doubt could spur anti-government resentment, political disengagement, and national or regional division, ultimately accomplishing the Kremlin's goal of destabilizing the target government.<sup>200</sup>

The North Atlantic Treaty and NATO's recent advocacy to develop cyber defence strategies do not have a clear policy for countering such attacks. The onus falls on individual states to develop strategies to counter information campaigns that attempt to attack the government or ignite an opposition movement. With non-conventional strategies such as disinformation campaigns becoming more frequent and easier to spread with advanced technologies, NATO faces a challenge that is beyond the scope of the alliance. It was created to deter large Soviet forces and tanks from entering the Western world, not from campaigns that hope to break a nation from within. Therefore, though allies will likely support each other in each state's quest for developing effective ways to deter these campaigns, there will likely not be adequate consensus on retaliation in response to a disinformation attack.

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<sup>199</sup> Giles, Keir.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

### *Limited Involvement and Plausible Deniability*

In addition to using new tactics with technology, Russia has also developed its use of plausible deniability. This development could be viewed as an evolution from its use of international agreements to create legitimacy in previous interventions. For example, as discussed earlier Russia displayed open support for the South Ossetians and Abkhazians against their fight against the government in the Kremlin's pursuit of creating instability in Georgia. This was easy to accomplish considering that Russia had peacekeepers stationed in both regions.<sup>201</sup> Furthermore, Russia used the Sochi Agreement to justify its presence, even though international leaders argued that, after the beginning of the conflict, more troops entered the region than the treaty permitted.<sup>202</sup>

In Ukraine, Russian actions in Crimea were similar to those in Georgia. The Russian military was already present, many stationed at the Black Sea Fleet, making annexation easier than if Russia had to separately deploy troops.<sup>203</sup> However, Russia's alleged use of "little green men" to take over the Parliament building in Crimea and, then, its support for separatists in Ukraine's eastern region demonstrate Putin's boldness to take risks in conflicts and comfort with denying involvement or responsibility.<sup>204</sup> Putin eventually admitted his plans to take Crimea prior to seizing the Parliament.<sup>205</sup> Still, he has

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<sup>201</sup> Nichol, Jim. "Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests". 3-5.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Yuhas, Alan and Raya Jalabi. "Ukraine Crisis: Why Russia sees Crimea as its Naval Stronghold". *The Guardian Online*. March 7, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/07/ukraine-russia-crimea-naval-base-tatars-explainer>.

<sup>204</sup> RT News. "Putin Acknowledges Russian Military Servicemen were in Crimea". *RT News Online*. April 17, 2014. <https://www.rt.com/news/crimea-defense-russian-soldiers-108/>.

<sup>205</sup> BBC News. "Putin Reveals Secrets of Russia's Crimea Takeover Plot". *BBC News Online*. March 9, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31796226>.

avoided claiming the “little green men” as Russian soldiers, going only so far as to say these “self-defense forces [were]...backed by Russian servicemen.”<sup>206</sup> To date, Russia continues to deny that any “regular Russian soldiers” are fighting in eastern Ukraine, regardless of reports from eyewitnesses, media sources, and the cargo shipments of coffins from Ukraine to Russia.<sup>207</sup> Instead, Putin claims any Russian citizen fighting in Ukraine is a volunteer.<sup>208</sup> Russia also continues to deny providing the separatist forces with any military equipment.<sup>209</sup> However, a recent European General Court decision concluded that Russia has provided weaponry to the separatists.<sup>210</sup> Though confronted with this, the Kremlin continues blatantly denying any involvement.

Previously, Russia used international agreements and treaties to justify its involvement in interventions. Now, the Kremlin is finding ways to deny its involvement entirely, using unidentified troops, claiming Russians involved are only volunteers, and continuing to deny providing equipment. Russia’s willingness to implement clandestine operations in a border state should trouble NATO members. Similar to cyber and information warfare, it is difficult place to blame on Russia when the government repeatedly denies involvement and willingly clouds transparency. If Russia were to engage

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.:

<sup>207</sup> Czuperski, Maksymilian, John Herbst, Eliot Higgins, Alina Polyakova, and Damon Wilson. “Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin’s War in Ukraine”. *Atlantic Council*. 2015, [http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/Hiding\\_in\\_Plain\\_Sight/HPS\\_English.pdf](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/Hiding_in_Plain_Sight/HPS_English.pdf). 15.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.:

<sup>209</sup> Ukraine Crisis. “Russian Involvement in Ukraine’s Donbas “Republics”: 10 Things You Should Know”. *Ukraine Crisis Media Center*. January 05, 2017. <http://uacrisis.org/51378-russian-involvement-donbas>.

<sup>210</sup> General Court of the European Union. “The General Court Upholds the Freezing of Funds of the Russian Company Almaz-Antey”. *General Court of the European Union Press Release No 6/17*. January 25, 2017. <https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2017-01/cp170006en.pdf>.

in similar actions in Latvia or Estonia, it might be difficult to officially tie Russia to the events. The Kremlin could use “little green men” or call a small brigade of forces “volunteers” to implement a small attack on a government building in Latvia or Estonia’s Russian speaking regions.

### *Concluding Remarks*

The analysis above suggests that NATO and Russia will continue to have a contentious relationship, but that the aspects of that relationship is changing. Possible gains for Russia in a conventional attack on Latvia or Estonia are likely offset by the risk of NATO Allies invoking Article 5. However, engaging through asymmetric tactics could bring political gains, create an opportunity to deny involvement, and decrease the risk of retaliation. If evidence suggested, but could not confirm, Russia had inspired and provided support to an opposition movement in Latvia or Estonia, the Allies would be forced to make a difficult decision: respond to a non-conventional nuclear power, risking massive retaliation, or accept any territorial losses or frozen conflicts.

Possible weaknesses of NATO, some of which have developed recently, increases the likelihood of the Allies facing that difficult decision. NATO’s lack of available military equipment and the geography of Estonia and Latvia would complicate any attack that needed a rapid response to prevent a massive loss. NATO has tried curb this problem by deploying more troops to the Baltic region.<sup>211</sup> These troops would likely be useful in delaying any advancements of an attack, especially if the forces were merely a small

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<sup>211</sup> Schmitt, Eric.

brigade of “little green men”. However, because this is a recent development, more time is needed to determine the effectiveness of this addition.

Other weaknesses might not be as easy to remedy by adding equipment or personnel. As war continues to utilize asymmetric and less conventional tactics, all NATO members may have a harder time making a consensus decision. In cases such as cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, or plausible deniability, some NATO members may hesitate in deciding to respond or what method of a response would be necessary.

NATO has undoubtedly been an effective institution in bringing countries together that believe in the principles of the alliance and establishing a commitment to Euro-Atlantic security. These principles have changed from deterring Soviet expansion and influence to broader security objectives, such as the fight against terrorism and the spread of democracy. However, the international field continues changing and the question remains if NATO could, or should, adapt to meet these changes. In some ways, the alliance has decided to modernize by recently creating a cyber-defence institution to develop strategies to deter future cyber-attacks. Though useful in many ways, policy goals tend to focus specifically on defending a state’s infrastructure from a debilitating state-led cyber-attack. This captures only one area of cyber risks. Others include possible disinformation campaigns that may encourage an opposition movement or an offensive attack on a local government in a Russian-speaking region with unidentifiable, yet very well equipped soldiers. Recent developments in NATO indicate that the alliance is aware of its shortcomings. However, more policies should be developed that provides clarity on terminology and plausible effective responses to an asymmetric offensive attack or determine modern boundaries within its collective defence framework.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUDING REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS

Based on the analysis above, the high risk of a NATO armed response will likely deter a Russian conventional intervention in Estonia or Latvia. However, the Georgia and Ukraine conflicts highlight Russia's evolving capability using non-conventional tactics to confront asymmetrical actors. The possibility of Russia intervening in a NATO member state should not be quickly cast aside. With the changing nature of warfare, security analysts would be wise to reassess the security of the Baltic regions. As the Georgian and Ukrainian conflicts demonstrate, Russia brazenly uses international agreements to justify aggressive actions that the international community repeatedly calls a violation of international law and norms. Yet international opposition appears ineffective in influencing Russia's decision to intervene. If the Kremlin were susceptible to international soft diplomacy like sanctions, Russia would have ceased its operations in Crimea after the implementation of sanctions. On the contrary, high domestic public opinions after Crimea could imply that the populace supports the Kremlin's actions abroad if there is a geographic, cultural, or historic connection. If the "window of opportunity" and desire exists, the Kremlin might try to interfere in the Baltics.

The Kremlin's "window of opportunity" contains a key element: a bordering country with Russian compatriots that are allegedly discriminated against where the Kremlin can use international agreements to justify an intervention on humanitarian principles. These factors are seen in Estonia and Latvia, where the Russian speaking areas Ida-Viru and Latgale experience higher rates of unemployment and poverty than the

majority population. It is possible that domestic legislation contributes to this disparity, which allow for indirect discrimination against individuals who do not have advanced levels of the state language. Legislation on pensions could also play a role, as ethnic Russians eligible for pensions in Estonia or Latvia could receive a lower pension if they worked in a different republic during the Soviet Union. Finally, Russian speakers struggling to pass the language proficiency exam to receive citizenship are stuck with the status of “stateless person,” limiting their voting rights and political representation, which could, consequently, increase their sense of social marginalization and decrease their sense of belonging to their state of residence. If the Kremlin had the political desire for intervening in Estonia or Latvia, the necessary “window of opportunity” to establish its Russian-perceived grounds for action exists.

According to the RAND Corporation, Russia has the conventional capability to invade and occupy Estonia and Latvia. Recent decisions from NATO show the alliance’s awareness of the Russian threat of aggression. At the 2016 Warsaw Summit, allies agreed to increase NATO presence in the east, creating four rotational battalion-size battlegroups, one in each Baltic state and the fourth in Poland.<sup>212</sup> Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States each agreed to lead one of the groups.<sup>213</sup> This multinational effort reasserts the alliances commitment to deterrence and defence in the Baltics.

As the alliance appears to be striving to reinforce its commitments, the United States’ commitment to the alliance might be wavering. Although Secretary of Defense

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<sup>212</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (8). “Boosting NATO’s Presence in the East and Southeast”. *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*. March 15, 2017. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_136388.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm).

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

James Mattis has publically stated that the United States is undoubtedly committed to NATO, U.S. President Donald Trump's consistent and caustic criticism of the 23 members not meeting their financial commitments raises questions about Trump's view of the alliance.<sup>214</sup> White House officials described Trump's speech in May where he vowed to "never forsake the friends that stood by our side" after Sept. 11 in May as an "affirmation on mutual defence."<sup>215</sup> European leaders, on the other hand, view Trump's words with ambiguity.<sup>216</sup> Whether next month President Trump will view NATO as "obsolete" or "no longer obsolete" remains a mystery, which could have catastrophic effects for Baltic security. Due to these developments, it is uncertain if the United States would agree to invoke Article 5 in response to a security issue in Estonia or Latvia.

Even if NATO's mutual defense clause would deter the Russian government from pursuing a conventional intervention, the question remains on how NATO would deter or defend against a non-conventional strategy. Transparency issues from non-conventional attacks could delay or deteriorate the Allies commitment to mutual defence. Going forward, NATO must develop a stronger definition as to what constitutes an "armed attack" and how the Allies should identify, deter, and respond to new warfare strategies such as cyber and information attacks. Finally, Russia's ability to create "plausible deniability" and covertly support opposition forces should concern Allies. Though small, NATO's

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<sup>214</sup> Campbell, Elizabeth. "Mattis Says There is 'No Doubt' U.S. is Committed to NATO Countries". *CBS News Online*. May 29, 2017. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/james-mattis-says-there-is-no-doubt-that-united-states-is-committed-to-nato-countries/>; Shear, Michael D., Mark Landler, and James Kanter. "In NATO Speech, Trump is Vague About Mutual Defense Pledge". *New York Times*. May 25, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/25/world/europe/donald-trump-eu-nato.html? r=0>.

<sup>215</sup> Shear, Michael D., Mark Landler, and James Kanter. "In NATO Speech, Trump is Vague About Mutual Defense Pledge".

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.:

increased presence in the Baltics might provide the necessary support to stop any opposition forces that are at risk of creating a situation in Estonia or Latvia that is similar to Ukraine. In the future, it seems vital for Allies to continue strengthening each members' domestic forces to counter and quickly respond to domestic threats. Although mutual defence and the threat of Article 5 might have been the alliance's strongest characteristic at the beginning, perhaps mutual deterrence alongside individual efforts will play a bigger role in preserving international security in the North Atlantic.

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