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## THE BEAR COMES OUT OF HIBERNATION: RUSSIA'S INCREASINGLY AGGRESSIVE FOREIGN POLICY

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**JCSP 43**

***Exercise Solo Flight***

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## **THE BEAR COMES OUT OF HIBERNATION: RUSSIA'S INCREASINGLY AGGRESSIVE FOREIGN POLICY**

Following a military intervention in Ukraine, Russia annexed Crimea into its territory on March 18 2014. Until Crimea, Russia's attempt to advance its stature as a world power had been fairly unsuccessful. NATO, which had been created to defend against the Soviet Union, was slowly diminishing the amount of troops present in Europe. It even expanded into Russia's old sphere of influence by bringing into the Alliance the Baltic States and neighboring countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic. While it successfully pushed back in Georgia, the conflict was seen as a way for Russia to prevent the country from joining NATO; it did so despite the abysmal performance of its military personal and equipment.

Following Georgia, Vladimir Putin realized that to enact his vision for Russia and gain back its stature as a world power he needed drastic military modernization. Crimea was the first operation where Russia was truly able to demonstrate these increased military capabilities. It showed that Russia now had the military means to back-up a more aggressive foreign policy. This was further demonstrated with Russia's deployment to Syria, its first expeditionary deployment since Afghanistan. All of these actions have had an effect on European security and have forced NATO and the European Union to react.

This paper will demonstrate that Russia, by modernizing its military, has allowed for the implementation of a more aggressive foreign policy and through its operations in Ukraine and Syria has re-emerged as a key world player. This aggressiveness has allowed it to destabilize European security, while avoiding direct engagement with NATO.

To support this thesis, this paper will first analyze the change in tone of Russian foreign policy. Then we will look at how Russia modernized its military to allow for the enactment of more aggressive policies. Then using the application of power: diplomacy, information, military and economic (DIME) we will look at how Russia's military operation in Syria was key in advancing a more aggressive foreign policy. Finally we will look at how this aggressiveness has affected European Security.

## **FOREIGN POLICY CHANGE**

Following the fall of the USSR, Russia's international influence had been consistently diminishing. In an article written by Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, mentioned that "there are . . . those, both in Russia and outside of it, who believe that Russia is doomed to drag behind, trying to catch up with the West and forced to bend to other players' rules, and hence will be unable to claim its rightful place in international affairs."<sup>1</sup> Since his arrival to power as President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin has been working hard to bring back the international status the country enjoyed during the time of the USSR.<sup>2</sup>

Following the end of the Cold War Russia had gotten closer to the EU, increasing its partnership with NATO, the USSR's historical foe, as well as becoming a member of the G8. However, a series of actions by the U.S., Europe and NATO have pushed Russia

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<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov's article "Russia's Foreign Policy: Historical background" for "Russia in Global Affairs" magazine, 3 March 2016, [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2124391c](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2124391c)

<sup>2</sup> Olga Oliker, "Unpacking Russia's New National Security Strategy." Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 7 2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/unpacking-russias-new-national-security-strategy>.

towards their current foreign policy. In 1997 the NATO-Russia Founding Act was intended to be the formal beginning of the NATO Russia relationship. It stated that:

Proceeding from the principle that the security of all states in the Euro-Atlantic community is indivisible, NATO and Russia will work together to contribute to the establishment in Europe of common and comprehensive security based on the allegiance to shared values, commitments and norms of behavior in the interests of all states.<sup>3</sup>

These objectives quickly fell apart when NATO intervened in Kosovo against Russia's wishes. The intervention showed Russia that despite the Founding Act it could not influence NATO and would never be a fully trusted partner.<sup>4</sup> From then on the relationship only became more difficult. The frustration grew when NATO and the EU, with the backing of the U.S., expanded in Russia's sphere of influence, with Putin only pushing back in Georgia and Ukraine. Furthermore, in Russia's opinion, the conflicts in Libya and Iraq (waged under the premise of world and humanitarian security) were fought in order to increase the U.S. strategic influence in order to maintain a unipolar system. Overall, Russia is arguing that U.S. action in Europe and the world are an attempt at limiting its strategic positions in Europe;<sup>5</sup> thus Russia's requirement for a more aggressive foreign policy in order to counter-balance the U.S. and its European Allies.

Since first elected in 2000 Putin has been attempting to bring Russia back to its former stature. However, since his re-election in 2012 the changes have accelerated in order to shift Russia's foreign policy and finally bring the country back as a key element

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<sup>3</sup> NATO, "Founding Act: On Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation signed in Paris, France", Last updated 12 October 2009. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_25468.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Roger E. Kanet, and Maxime Henri André Larivé, "NATO and Russia: A Perpetual New Beginning," *Perceptions* 17, no. 1 (2012): 82.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Spassov, "NATO, Russia and European Security: Lessons Learned from Conflicts in Kosovo and Libya," *Connections : The Quarterly Journal* 13, no. 3 (2014): 25.

of a multi-polar world.<sup>6</sup> The 2013 *Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* states that there a need for “a new vision of priorities in Russia’s foreign policy, taking into account Russia’s increased responsibility for setting the international agenda and shaping the system of international relations.”<sup>7</sup>

This statement shows that Russia believed itself to be ready to take its place back as a central figure of world diplomacy. Having failed to regain its stature through its participation in international organizations, Russia had to adopt a more aggressive foreign policy. However it didn’t have the military power to back its ambition, a situation that has changed in the last few years. The effect of this modernization will be analyzed in more detail in the next section.

Looking at Russian official documents it is possible to see the increase in the aggressiveness of the Russian foreign policy. The 2013 *Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* seemed fairly conciliatory in its approach, barely mentioning the role of the military and, except for North Korea, of what many people in the West consider “rogue states”. By contrast, the 2016 *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* approved by Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016 demonstrates a total shift with the document being much more assertive.

The document talks about tension in the world with a military or hard power undertone throughout. Statements such as: “Alongside military might, other important factors allowing States to influence international politics are taking center stage,

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<sup>6</sup> Konstantin K Khudoley, "Russia's Foreign Policy Amid Current International Tensions." *Teorija in Praksa* 53, no. 2 (2016): 390.

<sup>7</sup> Russia, The Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*. 18 February 2013, art 3.

including economic, legal, technological and IT capabilities,”<sup>8</sup> that were not present in the 2013 version, clearly demonstrates Russia’s more aggressive approach. While it also mentioned that “Using these capabilities to pursue geopolitical interest is detrimental to efforts to find ways to settle disputes,”<sup>9</sup> they are tools that have been used by Russia in the last few years, especially in Ukraine, and are now commonly known as Hybrid Warfare.

Also displayed is Russia’s willingness to go against international trends by supporting Syria, stating “Russia supports the unity, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic.”<sup>10</sup> This statement was put into practice with the support of the Bashar al-Assad regime following the April 2017 U.S. strike in retaliation for an alleged chemical attack by the regime on its own population. The document also discusses Russia’s cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran, once again going against the international trend.

While Russia’s foreign policy still promotes a strict observation of international laws, there has been a shift were in practice it is now more loosely applied.<sup>11</sup> This looser application has enabled them to be more aggressive internationally as displayed with their action in the Ukraine and Syria. Also, these actions clearly demonstrate a militarization of Russian international policies. Since Crimea, Russia has started to increase the use of military power outside its borders. Examples of this are: their interventions in the Donbass in Ukraine, the frequent encounters of their air assets with NATO ships and planes, and most off all Syria, which will be analyzed in more detail later on.

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<sup>8</sup> Russia, The Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. 1 December 2016, art 8.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., art. 93.

<sup>11</sup> Konstantin K Khudoley, "Russia's Foreign Policy Amid Current International Tensions." 394.

Since Crimea, Russia has been deploying its military in order to achieve or advance its foreign policy objectives. During an interview with Russian commentator Marat Gelman, Vladimir Lukin, the former ambassador to the United States and current human rights ombudsman stated when asked why Russian troops were sent in the Donbass, stated that the goal was to “explain to [President] Poroshenko that he cannot win, ever.”<sup>12</sup> In this case the military objective was never to take the full country, but to make a foreign policy statement about the fact that Ukraine was still part of Russia’s sphere of influence and that it would never let it join NATO.

That being said, the fact that Russia’s military capabilities have slowly been catching up to its ambition doesn’t mean that they will be employed. Russia’s policy is still to attempt to achieve a diplomatic solution, however if it fails they now have a greater ability to coerce the desired result. As an example, before invading Crimea Russia threatened economic sanctions, offered economic assistance and engaged in diplomacy, before invading when everything failed.<sup>13</sup>

So unlike before, the military doctrine of Russia acknowledges that the military can be used as a tool to advance its foreign policies objectives.<sup>14</sup> Looking at how the military is being employed outside its borders shows that Russia will try to apply the right amount of power to achieve its political objectives. Military action appears to be reserved for times when they feel that their overall influence would be diminished if they didn’t intervene (Ukraine or Georgia joining NATO or losing an ally if Assad fell in

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Goble, “Moscow views Donetsk and Luhansk as Surety Against Ukraine Joining NATO, Lukin Says,” *The Interpreter*, 31 August 2014. <http://www.interpretermag.com/moscow-views-donetsk-and-luhansk-as-surety-against-ukraine-joining-nato-lukin-says/>.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Charap, “Russia’s Use of Military Force as a Foreign Policy Tool Is There a logic?,” *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 443*, October 2016. [http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/Pepm443\\_Charap\\_Oct2016\\_4.pdf](http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/Pepm443_Charap_Oct2016_4.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Konstantin K Khudoley, "Russia's Foreign Policy Amid Current International Tensions." 395.



Syria).<sup>15</sup> The ways they have strategically employed their military power clearly demonstrates that it is being used in a thoughtful manner, with the goal of advancing their policies. Now that they have demonstrated willingness and the ability to deploy outside their borders, just the threat of sending the military might enable them to achieve their foreign policy objectives.

## **MILITARY MODERNIZATION**

The ability to employ its military as a center piece of their foreign policy is something Russia has been working at for a long time. While it has been acknowledged for a while that the Russian military needed to be revamped, the catalyst was truly the 2008 war in Georgia. In Georgia, despite its size superiority, Russia's had an uneasy victory due to their soldiers using obsolete equipment and being led by officers unprepared for combat.<sup>16</sup> The war demonstrated as previously in Chechnia, that they were inadequately prepared to deal with the current security environment.<sup>17</sup> The 2008 reform, following Georgia, was not the first attempt; however the earlier attempt only succeeded in reducing the size of the military. This meant that the Russian army was still a smaller version of the old USSR conscript army.<sup>18</sup>

For Vladimir Putin it was clear that without a strong military as part of its foreign policy toolbox it would be difficult to intimidate countries in its sphere of influence if

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<sup>15</sup> Samuel Charap, "Russia's Use of Military Force as a Foreign Policy Tool Is There a logic?"

<sup>16</sup> Dmitri Trenin, "The Revival of the Russian Military: How Moscow Reloaded." *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 95. (2016).

<sup>17</sup> Bettina Renz, "Russian Military Reform: Prospects and Problems." *The RUSI Journal* 155, no. 1 (2010): 58.

<sup>18</sup> Bettina Renz, "Russian Military Capabilities After 20 Years of Reform." *Survival* 56, no. 3 (2014): 61.

they were to decide to have diverging interests.<sup>19</sup> Major changes needed to be done to move the military from one setup to deal with a Cold War European conflict to one able to be effective in the modern security environment. To do this, reform needed to be completed in areas such as: professionalism, integration and equipment modernization.

A key element of the reform has been Russian transition to a professional force. Historically, the Russian army had been relying on mobilization and conscription to fill its ranks in time of war. This meant only 17 percent of all units were permanently staffed and ready to deploy.<sup>20</sup> While conscription is still an important element of the Russian military, it has now moved away from mobilizing conscripts in case of conflict.

Moving away from mobilization enabled the Russian military to disband a number of units. This in turn allowed it to cut the number of officers by almost half, since it was believed that the military was too top heavy.<sup>21</sup> Having its units manned with more professional troops and having better trained officers has allowed Russia to increase the readiness of its military. As stated by Gustav Gressel, a fellow with the European Council on Foreign Relations, “While in the past the Russian armed forces needed years or months to gear up for military confrontation, they now have the ability to react quickly and strike without warning.”<sup>22</sup> While they are still not done transforming themselves into a more professional military, the work done so far has helped Russian foreign policy by having a military that can be more reactive to the ever changing international security threat.

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<sup>19</sup> Gustav Gressel, *Russia's Quiet Military Revolution and what it Means for Europe*, European Council on Foreign Relations (2015): 3.

<sup>20</sup> Bettina Renz, "Russian Military Reform: Prospects and Problems," 58.

<sup>21</sup> Pavel Felgenhauer, “A Profound Change in the Russian Military may be Happening as the Power of The General Staff is Undermined” *Perspective* 19, No. 1, (2009).  
<https://www.bu.edu/iscip/vol19/felgenhauer1.html>

<sup>22</sup> Gustav Gressel, *Russia's Quiet Military Revolution and what it Means for Europe*, 2.

As part of increasing its readiness, the military had to modify their structure to better integrate. The different military districts have been reshaped into Joint Forces Command and their numbers diminished. Redundant organizations were closed and the logistical organization was reformed. This means that each Joint Forces Commander now has access to all the naval, army and air assets in their region.<sup>23</sup> This increased control ensures a better integration of all Russian elements, something that had been lacking in Georgia.

However, one of the most important elements of Russia's improved integration has been the opening of the new National Defense Control Center in Moscow late 2014. According to its first commander Lt. General Mikhail Mitzintsev, it "centralizes all controls of both the military machine and the economy of the nation in the interest of war."<sup>24</sup> The role of this center is similar to the National military Command Center in Washington D.C. It offers Russia the ability to execute the military command and control required to meet foreign policy objectives, not only with Russia's direct neighbors, but also anywhere in the world, Syria being an example.

The third element of Russian military modernization is the phasing-in of new equipment. Around 2008, about 10 percent of the military equipment was considered modern. As part of the modernization those numbers were scheduled to move steadily to 70 percent by 2020.<sup>25</sup> After Putin announced the rearmament plan in 2012, defense spending rose steadily. However, with the economic downturn due to the fall in energy

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>24</sup> RT, "Russia launch wartime government HQ", 1 December 2014. <https://www.rt.com/news/210307-russia-national-defence-center/>.

<sup>25</sup> Bettina Renz, "Russian Military Reform: Prospects and Problems," 59.

prices and the economic sanctions following the evasion of Crimea, defense spending has fallen from \$91.1 billion in 2015 to \$66.4 billion in 2016.<sup>26</sup>

Due to the economic downturn, the equipment renewal that was supposed to be mostly completed in 2020, has been pushed in some case to the 2030s.<sup>27</sup> Efforts have now been made to improve or upgrade current platforms instead of designing new ones.<sup>28</sup> While not ideal it is still a step in the right direction and should greatly increase Russia's capabilities, allowing it to support a more aggressive foreign policy.

With all these reforms it should not have been a surprise that Russia was successful in its deployments in Ukraine and Syria. However, many in the West were surprised by the Russian military capabilities. This is mainly due to the fact they had witnessed Russian modernization failures over the years. When these failures are coupled with Russia's difficulty in upgrading equipment, something which is very visible, it could explain why the West failed to analyze the other parts of the modernization: the move to a professional army with improved integration.<sup>29</sup>

This increase in capability was validated by the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), Gen Breedlove, in a hearing of the Senate Committee on Armed Services, where he stated: "Russia continues its long-term military modernization efforts, and its recent actions in Ukraine and Syria demonstrate an alarming increase in expeditionary force projection and combat capability and logistical sustainment

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<sup>26</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "SIPRI Military expenditure Database - Data for all countries from 1988–2016 in constant (2015) USD (pdf)". <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Milex-constant-2015-USD.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Gustav Gressel, *Russia's Quiet Military Revolution and what it Means for Europe*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> James Mugg, "Russian Military Modernization: Everything Old is new again", *ASPI The Strategist*, 17 January 2017. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/russian-military-modernisation-everything-old-new/>

<sup>29</sup> Gustav Gressel, *Russia's Quiet Military Revolution and what it Means for Europe*, 3.

capacity.”<sup>30</sup> With all aspect of the modernization progressing, albeit at a slower pace for equipment, Russia’s ability to back its foreign policy with the military, as we have seen in Ukraine and Syria will only increase and become more effective.

## **SYRIA**

Russia’s deployment in Syria has demonstrated the progress made by its military, while also giving Vladimir Putin the ability to showcase a more aggressive foreign policy. Had the deployment to Syria been a total failure it is very likely that Russia would have had to tone down its rhetoric. Using the Diplomacy, Information, Military and Economics (DIME) model we will look at the Russian effort in Syria and demonstrate how the military was key in advancing Russia’s foreign policy in all aspects of the DIME model, not only in Syria but also in other regions of interest.

## **Diplomacy**

The operation in Syria was the first true military deployment outside the old confines of the USSR since the conflict in Afghanistan. Following the end of the Cold War and the fall of the USSR Russia has had a diminished role in international diplomacy. With the exception of having a veto at the United Nations Security Council, it had lost the majority of its influence outside the confine of the old USSR. Vladimir Putin’s goal has always been to bring Russia back to what he considers its rightful place in the world order. The deployment in Syria has given Russia greater diplomatic power.

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<sup>30</sup> U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, Committee Hearing on United States European Command: General Philip M. Breedlove, SACEUR, Written Testimony, 1 March 2016.

With a Russian presence on the ground, Vladimir Putin has made sure a diplomatic solution to the conflict cannot be done without involving Moscow.<sup>31</sup>

With the USA, until recently, mainly staying on the sideline Vladimir Putin has positioned himself to be center stage both militarily and diplomatically. Now having the military to push a more aggressive foreign policy, Russia stepped in when Barrack Obama failed to act after Syria crossed the red line he had established. This allowed Putin to make the point to the Russian population and to the world that Russia was back as a power that was once again able to counterbalance the USA.<sup>32</sup>

Without a military deployment it is highly unlikely Russia would have gained the necessary leverage to become a key diplomatic player in the region. Due to the deployment in Syria, the threat to deploy its military can now be used as a diplomatic tool to reinforce Russian foreign policy.

## **Information**

Russia, with its military operation in Syria, has made strong use of the different information mediums to prop its more aggressive foreign policy. First, there is the world media coverage of the Russian military deployment. More often than not the coverage is negative with headlines such as “UK forces escort passing Russian ‘ship of shame’ returning from Syria”<sup>33</sup> referring to the carrier Admiral Kuznetsov transiting the English Channel. However, the fact that British and world media are discussing a Russian

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<sup>31</sup> Leon Aron, “Drivers of Putin’s Foreign Policy.” American Enterprise Institute, 14 June 2016. <https://www.aei.org/publication/drivers-of-putins-foreign-policy/>.

<sup>32</sup> Frederic C. Hof, “Can Russian Diplomacy End the Syrian War,” *Defence News*, 30 January 2017. <http://www.defensenews.com/articles/can-russian-diplomacy-end-the-syrian-war>.

<sup>33</sup> Ritvik Carvalho, “UK forces escort passing Russian ‘ship of shame’ returning from Syria,” *Reuters*, 25 January 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-russia-ship-idUSKBN1591VA>.

military overseas deployment is most likely achieving one of the Russian goals: to let the world know that it can once again conduct expeditionary operations. In this case the world media coverage serves to reinforce the notion, especially in Europe, that Russia can use its military to back-up a more aggressive foreign policy.

In order to shape its message Russia has also been conducting an aggressive information operation. This message is to reinforce the military as a key tool of Russian foreign policy. Even with substantive proof that Russia has mainly destroyed non-ISIS targets in order to support the Assad regime, Putin continues to stress that the Russian military is there to fight terrorism.<sup>34</sup> This deception might have been an attempt to give legitimacy to his action, but it's hard to believe that the West would fall for it; however, it is useful to reinforce Putin's position of power in Russia. Either way, through this deployment, Russia has been able to employ the actions of its military to enforce more aggressive policies and the need for others to pay greater attention.

## **Military**

Russia military operation in Syria, as previously mentioned, is the first true deployment of forces outside the country since Afghanistan. In order to support its foreign policy Russia needed a show of force to prove that their military was able to effectively deploy and sustain expeditionary operations. The deployment surprised many observers who didn't believe the country was capable of such an operation.<sup>35</sup> While a vast majority of observers disagree with Russia actions in Syria, the deployment has

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<sup>34</sup> Maksymilian Czapurski, John Herbst, Eliot Higgins, Frederic Hof, and Ben Nimmo, "Distract, Deceive, Destroy: Putin at war in Syria," *Atlantic Council*, April 2016, 3. <http://publications.atlanticcouncil.org/distract-deceive-destroy/>.

<sup>35</sup> Bettina Renz, "Why Russia is Reviving its Conventional Military Power." *Parameters* 46, no. 2 (2016): 29.

served to support Vladimir Putin's argument that Russia is back as an important player in the region.

A key element of Russia's deployment has been the use of new weapons. One of the more interesting was the use of cruise missiles that were launched from ships sailing in the Caspian Sea in the fall of 2015. This was the first operational use of the Kalibr 3M-54 (NATO codename – «Sizzler», SS-N-30A). The weapon is similar in capabilities to the Tomahawk missile and can be launched from ship or submarine giving Russia a capability that was previously only available to the USA or a few of its allies.<sup>36</sup> Having long range cruise missiles will allow the Russian Federation to reinforce its foreign policy in a similar fashion as America. They will now be able to deploy one single ship near an area they are trying to influence and coerce it with the threat of a cruise missile strike. From now on, by deploying cruise missile capable ships to a region, they will be able to make a strong foreign policy statement.

## **Economy**

Russia, in the last few years, as seen its economy crippled due to the price drop in oil and natural gas. That being said, with the EU dependent on Russia for about one third of its oil and gas supply, Russia knows that its economy will stabilize when prices go up once again.<sup>37</sup> <sup>38</sup> This is where the military intervention in Syria becomes important to Russia. For a few years Qatar has been attempting to build a pipeline from its natural gas

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<sup>36</sup> Andrei Akulov, "Kalibr: Russia's Naval System Upping Cruise Missile Game," *Online Journal Strategic Culture Foundation*, 24 May 2016. <http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2016/05/24/kalibr-russia-naval-system-upping-cruise-missile-game.html>

<sup>37</sup> Energy Post, "Europe Increasingly Depend on Oil Import, Above All From Russia," 15 July 2016. <http://energypost.eu/europe-increasingly-dependent-oil-imports-russia/>

<sup>38</sup> James Kanter, "Europe Seeks Alternatives to Russian Gas Imports," *New-York Times*, 16 February 2016. [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/17/business/energy-environment/european-union-seeks-to-reduce-reliance-on-russian-gas.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/17/business/energy-environment/european-union-seeks-to-reduce-reliance-on-russian-gas.html?_r=0).



field, which is to biggest one in the world through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Turkey. If built this pipeline would vastly increase the availability of natural gas in Europe and therefore undermine the Russian economy since many EU countries would rather buy non-Russian gas. Most likely under pressure from the Kremlin the Assad regime has refused to approve the construction of the pipeline in its territory.<sup>39</sup>

While not the only reason, many analysts believe Russia deployed its troops to Syria in order to protect the Syrian government. A new regime backed by the West would be more inclined to approve the construction of the pipeline. This would have a direct effect on the Russian economy and Putin's ability to maintain its stranglehold on Russia.<sup>40</sup>

Another advantage of the Russian campaign has been to showcase Russia's improved military capabilities. The second largest weapons exporter in the world, after the USA, Russia has seen the demand for its weapons increase in part due to the Syrian conflict. The increase in armament sales has helped to offset the diminution of gas price, with some peoples in the Kremlin estimating the increase in revenue to be in the billions of dollars.<sup>41</sup> The increased interest for its weapons in the Middle East, Asia and South America will allow Russia to employ armament sales as a foreign policy tool by increasing its influence in these regions.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Mitchell A. Orenstein and George Romer, "Putin's Gas Attack," *Foreign Affairs*, 14 October 2015. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2015-10-14/putins-gas-attack>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Mansur Mirovalev, "How Russia's Military Campaign in Syria is Helping Moscow Markey its Weapons," *Los-Angeles Times*, 25 November 2015. <http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-russia-weapons-20161118-story.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Mansur Mirovalev, "Syria's War: A Show Room for Russian Arms Sales," *Aljazeera*, 6 April 2016. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/04/syria-war-showroom-russian-arms-sales-160406135130398.html>.

## EUROPEAN SECURITY

Since the end of the Cold War, Russia had been attempting a rapprochement with Europe. While this rapprochement has been on shaky ground for a while, Russian intervention in Ukraine and Syria have only made matters worse, and have directly or indirectly affected European Security.

As previously mentioned, one of the reason for Russia's military operation in Syria was to block the construction of a pipeline bringing natural gas to Europe. While blocking the pipeline was considered a matter of national security for Russia, the same could be said for Europe, who increasingly sees its reliance on Russian gas as a matter of security.<sup>43</sup> This worry would not be as high had Russia not adopted an aggressive foreign policy. By demonstrating that it is willing to intervene in both its direct neighborhood and abroad if it feels its national security threatened, Russia is causing worry within Europe that any action it undertakes could lead to a disruption of gas and oil delivery.

The counter argument to this is that presently Russia is only trying to maintain the status quo by keeping its current share of the European energy market.<sup>44</sup> However, if Russia was to upset this market balance by selling more energy to the Asia then it would really be able to start to pressure Europe by jeopardizing its energy security. Hence the importance of Syria for Vladimir Putin.<sup>45</sup>

Another secondary order of effect with regard to the Russia involvement in Syria has been its influence on the migrant crisis. With their support to Bashar al-Assad, Russians are ensuring continuation of the Syrian conflict and the effects of war on the

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<sup>43</sup> Andrej Krickovic, "When Interdependence Produces Conflict: EU-Russia Energy Relations as a Security Dilemma." *Contemporary Security Policy* 36, no. 1 (2015): 10.

<sup>44</sup> Nursin Atesoglu Güney and Visne Korkmaz, "The Energy Interdependence Model between Russia and Europe: An Evaluation of Expectations for Change." *Perceptions* 19, no. 3 (2014): 35.

<sup>45</sup> Andrej Krickovic, "When Interdependence Produces Conflict": 10.

country's civilian population. With his actions Vladimir Putin has been able to indirectly affect European security by ensuring the flow of migrants into Europe continues. The SACEUR, General Breedlove stated such in a testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services in March 2016: "Together Russia and the Assad regime are deliberately weaponising migration in an attempt to overwhelm European structure and break European resolve."<sup>46</sup>

The effect of the migrant crisis can now be seen all over Europe with the rise of the far right populist movement. While Geert Wilder didn't win the election in the Netherlands he is likely to form the official opposition.<sup>47</sup> In France Marine Le Pen made it to the second round of the French Presidential election. While she lost the presidency, she got the opportunity to promote her anti EU and anti-immigration platform. Even German Chancellor Angela Merkel is facing a challenge from anti-immigration supporters in her bid for re-election. Immigration also played a role in Great-Britain voting to leave the European Union.<sup>48</sup> While the far right has been making progress for a while, Russia's actions in Syria has definitely helped its rise and allowed it to destabilize the European political system. It also diminished the continent's overall security by forcing many countries to turn their attention away from Russia's actions in Ukraine.

Helping to compound the effects of immigration on European security has been Russia's information warfare. General Breedlove in his testimony stated that "Russia overwhelms the information space with a barrage of lies that must be addressed by the

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<sup>46</sup> U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Committee Hearing Video on United States European Command*, 1 March 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Judy Dempsey, "Judy Asks: Is Populism on the Run?" Carnegie Europe, 26 April 2017. <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=68775>.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Hall, "How the Brexit campaign used refugees to scare voters," Public Radio International (PRI), 24 June 2016. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-06-24/how-brexit-campaign-used-refugees-scared-voters>.

United States more aggressively . . . to effectively expose the false narratives pushed by Russian-owned media outlets and their proxies”<sup>49</sup> These false narrative, or “fake news”, have had to effect of further destabilizing European politics. An example of this was the news that in Germany a 13 year old Russian-German girl had been raped by an immigrant. The news got a lot of attention with the Russian media and despite the fact that the claim was proven false, Sergey Lavrov, Russia foreign minister, still used the story to show how European governments were lacking in their ability to deal with the immigration crisis.<sup>50</sup>

It also appears that Russia attempted to meddle with the US election and there are questions regarding a link between Marine Le Pen and Russia.<sup>51</sup> All these actions are the result of Russia’s more aggressive foreign policy, which was made possible by Russia’s increased military means. Adding to these means has been the Russian military’s creation of an information warfare unit in February 2017. This unit will most certainly be used to destabilize government, but will also likely attempt to affect NATO’s resolve. An example of this kind of attack was a report that a German NATO soldier had committed a rape in Lithuania. In a statement General Petr Pavel heads of NATO’s military committee affirmed that Russia was behind the false information.<sup>52</sup> As Canada prepares to send soldiers to Latvia they will have to be ready to face the same kind of false accusations.

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<sup>49</sup> U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Committee Hearing on United States European Command: General Philip M. Breedlove, SACEUR, Written Testimony*, 1 March 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, “A Powerful Russian Weapon: The Spread of False Stories”, *New-York Times*, 28 August 2016. [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/29/world/europe/russia-sweden-disinformation.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/29/world/europe/russia-sweden-disinformation.html?_r=0).

<sup>51</sup> Gabriel Gatehouse, “Marine Le Pen: Who's funding France's far right?”, *BBC*, 3 April 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39478066>.

<sup>52</sup> Reuters, “Russia sets up information warfare units - defense minister”, 22 February 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/russia-military-propaganda-idUSL8N1G753J>.

All in all, it would appear that Russia is only becoming more aggressive and will continue to ramp up its information operation in Europe.

This increased aggressiveness of Russia's foreign policy and the risk it presents to Europe's security has forced NATO to review its posture towards Russia. Following the turn of the century NATO had diminished its force structure in Europe, despite ups and downs in its relations with Russia. However, since the invasion of Georgia in 2008 the relationship has been getting worse, with the invasion in Ukraine and the intervention in Syria have only making matters worse. In his testimony to Congress the SACEUR Gen Breedlove stated: "Despite these and many other U.S. and European overtures, it is now clear Russia does not share common security objectives with the West. Instead, it continues to view the United States and NATO as a threat to its own security."<sup>53</sup> It could be argued that Russia feels threatened due to the NATO expansion in its old sphere of influence. But regardless of the circumstance Russian actions have force NATO to react.

In order to respond to the increased security threat from Russia, NATO at the 2014 Wales Summit approved the Readiness Action Plan which is said to be "the most significant reinforcement of NATO's collective defense since the end of the Cold War."<sup>54</sup> The plan includes assurance measures in Eastern and Central Europe which are a "direct result of Russia's aggressive actions to NATO's east."<sup>55</sup> In order to respond to the increase threat the NATO Response Force was enhanced and the Very High Readiness Joint Task force was also created.

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<sup>53</sup> U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Committee Hearing on United States European Command: General Philip M. Breedlove, SACEUR, Written Testimony*, 1 March 2016.

<sup>54</sup> NATO, "Readiness Action Plan". Last updated 25 January 2017.  
[http://www.nato.int/cps/on/natohq/topics\\_119353.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/on/natohq/topics_119353.htm).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

The Wales Summit also saw countries commit to an increase in defense spending to 2% of their GDP.<sup>56</sup> While in general, due to the increase Russia threat, the legitimacy of NATO is no longer in question there has been a lot of pressure, especially from the new U.S administration, for members to meet their 2%. Failures by Alliance members to meet this commitment could eventually affect the cohesion of the organization, which would be a victory for Russia. In summary, by modernizing its military and adopting a more aggressive foreign policy Russia has threatened European security. It has forced NATO to increase spending and to raise the amount of troops in Europe, possibly leaving a vacuum in other part of the world. A vacuum Russia will certainly hope to fill. Finally, with their response to Russian action, the EU and NATO have legitimized Vladimir Putin's belief that Russia is back as a world power.

## CONCLUSION

This paper looked at how Russia was able to enact a more aggressive foreign policy through the modernization of its military. The *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* signed by Vladimir Putin in late November 2016 has adopted a more aggressive approach than the previous one signed in 2013. Russian actions in Ukraine and Syria have also shown that Russia can back this more aggressive policy when necessary.

The upgrade of the Russian military started in 2008 has been moving slower than Russia would have liked but it is now starting to bear fruit. The modernization concentrated on three mains aspects: professionalism, integration and equipment

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<sup>56</sup> NATO, "Wales Summit Declaration", 5 September 2014, Art.14.  
[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm).

modernization. While the first two have progressed well the equipment modernization, which is the most visible, has been slowed down due to the economic downturn. This has led many experts to believe the modernization was failing, and explains why Russia's success in Ukraine and Syria seemed to have caught so many people off guard. With their military becoming more professional, their integration greatly improved, and with their equipment getting better, Russian forces will only get more effective allowing them greater ability to back-up the country's foreign policy.

Using the elements of power we were able to show how Russia's military action in Syria helped advance its foreign policy. The deployment gave Russia the ability to use different media outlets to shape the message that it was back as a world power. It also displayed new capabilities, such as their cruise missile, something that will be key in allowing the country to put pressure on regions they are trying to influence, both close and far away from its borders. This military showcase has also enabled Russia to increase its armament sales, which should increase its sphere of influence. Finally when all of these are put together Russia's deployment greatly increased its diplomatic leverage in the region. From having no real say before its arrival, a solution to the Syrian crisis will now have to pass through Moscow.

The effects of Vladimir Putin's aggressive foreign policy are also starting to have a destabilizing effect on European security. From the rise of the far right movement, fueled in part by the Syrian migrant crisis, to European dependence to Russia's gas and oil, to Russian information warfare, Vladimir Putin has found ways to affect Europe's security. NATO has also been forced to react by increasing the amount of money spent on defense and raised the amount of troops on the ground to protect borders. While the

threat of an attack on NATO is low, Russian aggressive foreign policy is forcing the Alliance to take action.

So through military modernization Vladimir Putin has allowed Russia to back his more aggressive foreign policy. The result of which will be an increase in Russia's influence in the world. How much? Only time will tell.



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