

MILITARY DOMAIN AS A COMPONENT OF INFORMATION WARFARE

Zdzisław Śliwa, Anna Antczak



Abstract: Information warfare is an integral part of the struggle between contemporary nations and alliances, making use of a variety of instruments of asymmetric warfare. The Russian Federation employs this type of approach very effectively to influence the minds of foreign decision-makers and populations in targeted countries. The information domain is equally important for Russia's own domestic objectives of restoring national pride and integrity, as well as preserving trust in national leadership. Military manoeuvres play an important role in information warfare, provoking fear and uncertainty in other countries, while aiming to convince the Russian population to have faith in the special role their nation holds in the global order.

Keywords: *Information warfare, 'Zapad' series exercises, military affairs, Russian Federation*

1. Introduction

After a period of weakness and vulnerability following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation has been consistently striving to restore its former position as a global superpower. This is evidenced by the special emphasis on the development of its military capabilities as an essential constituent element of national power that supports foreign and internal policy. It is manifested in the modernization of its armed forces and an extensive program of military exercises that constitute a part of the information warfare waged against its surrounding neighbours and beyond. This instrument has already been used in Georgia, Ukraine and in Syria, supported by extensive and well-coordinated information campaigns. Each military exercise, new unit and new weapons system is skilfully utilized to influence the mindset of its potential opponents and to incite uncertainty, fear and confusion about Russia's actual objectives. Likewise, the establishment of 'non-military' capabilities, such as the National Guard of the Russian Federation (Rosgvardia), an independent internal military force that reports directly to the President, and the concentration of all defence-related sectors under one military command and control centre (National Defense Control Center, NDCC), indicate that certain messages are also designed for the national

audience, including Russian-speaking minorities in other countries, with the aim of fostering their pride in being part of the Russian nation. Large-scale military manoeuvres like the most recent strategic exercise Zapad 2017 serve as evidence of the continuing tug-of-war in the information domain, having been effectively utilized to demonstrate power and to hide weaknesses.

This paper provides an overview of information warfare as a constituent element of the modern struggle among nations within the ‘new generation warfare’ framework. The paper gives an overview of the utilization of the military domain as an integral part of the comprehensive approach to information warfare and highlights some of the tools used. The paper discusses how this important apparatus is used in the context of major military exercises, and also the ways in which it is used to hide shortcomings and demonstrate power to enhance Russia’s image as a major player in regional and global affairs. The assumption is that Russia is effectively using the entire information warfare toolbox and that there is a lack of understanding of such a complex narrative by Western readers, the main reason being that messages are taken at face value. This is related to the current eagerness to quickly publish hot topics without verifying them, inadvertently supporting the way Russian information warfare incites and fuels rumours, misperception and confusion. In this context, the knowledge, pragmatism and the experiences of the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) are invaluable to counter propaganda and disinformation that constitute a substantial part of information warfare.

2. The Complexity of Information Warfare

In discussing information warfare, it is pertinent to mention the term ‘hybrid warfare’ because that concept includes the parallel and coordinated use of conventional and unconventional means to achieve the desired result. It includes the utilization of information by all available means as a critical component of modern warfare during times of peace, crisis and war. Although the concept is not particularly new¹, hybridity has been more widely discussed

¹ For example see: **Nemeth, W.** 2002. *Future War and Chechnya: A Case for Hybrid Warfare*. Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School; **Hoffman, F.** 2009. *Hybrid Warfare and Challenges*. – Joint Forces Quarterly, 1st quarter, Issue 52. Washington: National Defense University Press; **Kofman, M.** 2016. *Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Arts*. – *War on the Rocks*, 11 March. <<https://warontherocks.com/2016/03/russian-hybrid-warfare-and-other-dark-arts/>> (accessed: 21 March 2018).

after the publication of an article by General Valery Gerasimov², the current Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces. His article discusses the “new generation warfare”, focusing on the emergent changes in the ways of conducting warfare against other nations.

Gerasimov has highlighted that “the role of non-military means in reaching political and military goals has increased, in some cases significantly exceeding the power of armed forces”³. The concept has been visualized (Figure 1) as the utilization of conventional and non-conventional means in a sequence of follow-on phases of an operation. The role of non-military measures is distinctly visible throughout all six phases, whereas the role of military power is to maintain constant pressure, uncertainty and readiness but directly engaging only starting from the fourth phase defined as “Crisis”.

Phases I and II include the formation of coalitions and political opposition against the enemy, including internally, potentially leading to ‘colour revolution’ type movements. Phases II and III include economic sanctions and diplomatic measures, resulting in a sustained tug-of-war when taking into consideration non-military tools in phases I to III. Information warfare is the overarching tool used across all phases, enabling to sustain constant pressure on the targeted nation. Tactics are constantly adjusted to shape the views of both international and national audiences.

The complexity of ‘hybrid warfare’ is recognized in NATO’s Allied Command Transformation report “Multiple Futures Project. Navigating Towards 2030”⁴. The NATO report posits that in the future adversaries will be “both interconnected and unpredictable, combining traditional warfare with irregular warfare, terrorism, and organised crime. Psychologically, adversaries will use the instantaneous connectivity of an increasingly effective

² Regarding the concepts of General Valery Gerasimov, see: Герасимов, В. 2013. Ценность Науки в Предвидении. Новые вызовы требуют переосмыслить формы и способы ведения боевых действий. – Военно-промышленный курьер, No 8 (476), 27 February 2013. Moscow.

<<http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>> (accessed: 21 March 2018) [Герасимов 2013]; and also

Thomas, T. 2016. Thinking Like A Russian Officer: Basic Factors And Contemporary Thinking On The Nature of War. April 2016. Fort Leavenworth: The Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO), pp. 16–19.

³ Герасимов 2013, op. cit.

⁴ NATO 2009 Multiple Futures Project. Navigating Towards 2030. April 2009. Norfolk: Allied Command Transformation.

<<https://www.act.nato.int/nato-multiple-futures-project-documents>> [NATO Multiple Futures Project 2009]

mass media to reshape or summarily reject the liberal values, ideas, and free markets that characterise the Alliance”⁵. The concept of ‘hybrid warfare’ has also been popularised in academic papers and official documents released by major nations and security-related entities indicating the need for a comprehensive and consolidated approach for applying it for their own purposes and to deny utilization by an adversary.

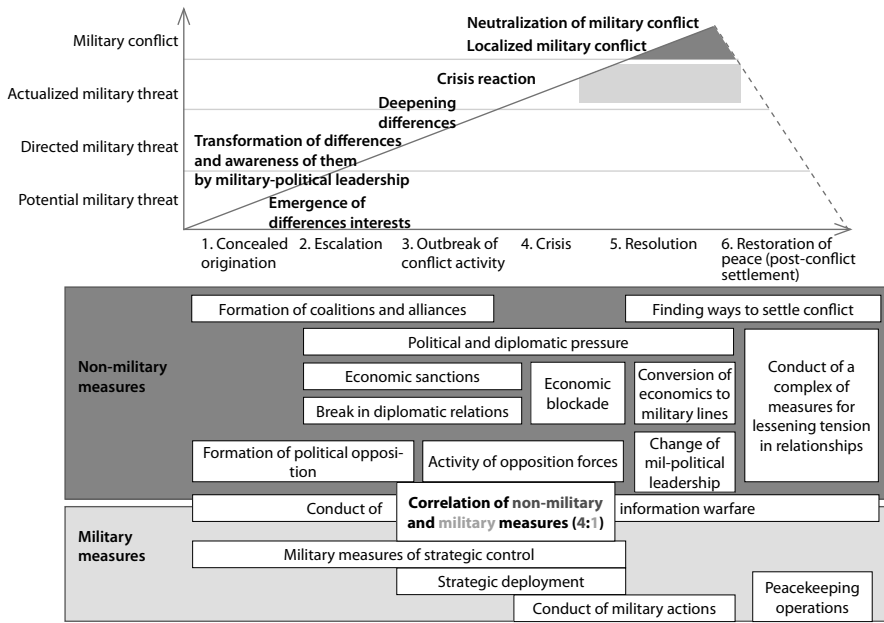


Figure 1. The Role of Non-Military Methods in the Resolution of Interstate Conflicts⁶

In the military domain, effective communication strategies are critical in all phases of engaging with a potential enemy. According to the 2011 Chatham House Report, it comprises “a systematic series of sustained and coherent activities, conducted across strategic, operational and tactical levels that enables understanding of target audiences and identifies effective conduits

⁵ NATO Multiple Futures Project 2009, p. 7.

⁶ Selhorst, A. J. C. 2016. Russia’s Perception Warfare: The Development of Gerasimov’s doctrine in Estonia and Georgia and it’s Application in Ukraine. – Militaire Spectator, No 4. <<https://www.militairespectator.nl/thema/strategie-operaties/artikel/russias-perception-warfare>> (accessed: 21 March 2018). Figure translated and created by G. Scott Gorman, School of Advanced Military Studies.

to promote and sustain particular types of behaviour”⁷. These strategies are activated during peacetime to influence the mindset of political elites, decision-makers and the whole population of the targeted nation. They include purposefully formulated key messages to influence particular groups that support the aggressor’s ideology, facilitating division in the society and fostering support among locals by promising future benefits. This approach utilises a variety of tools that are carefully adjusted based on research about the targeted nation and constant feedback about the effects of information operations, ultimately culminating in the development/emergence of a crisis situation because the strategic tools and messages allow the aggressor to justify initiating an attack in any domain of the “new generation warfare” by employing a variety of measures to engage the opponent in order to weaken or even overpower it. The outcome is grounded in a clearly established end state based on the strategy devised for the attacked region, alliance or nation. All the activities in the information sphere are considered as a type of weapon used in the whole spectrum of the engagement space - political, military, economic, social, information and infrastructure. The objective is to support national geopolitical objectives by attacking the opponent using all available instruments of power – political, military, economic and civil⁸.

Information operations supported by psychological operations are usually directed selectively using a multidimensional approach, usually conducted in at least two dimensions, as seen in the case of the war in Ukraine⁹. In the Ukrainian case, the first dimension addressed international society with the goal of denying or limiting support for Ukraine by employing the narrative

⁷ The definition by Steve Tatham quoted in: **Cornish, P.; Lindley-French, J.; Yorke, C.** 2011. Strategic Communications and National Strategy. A Chatham House Report, September, p. 4. <<https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/178465>>.

See also: **Missiroli, A. et al.** 2016. Strategic Communications – East and South. – REPORT No. 30. Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies. <<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/strategic-communications-%E2%80%93-east-and-south>> [**Missiroli et al.** 2016];

Reding, A.; Weed, K.; Ghez, J. J. 2010. NATO’s Strategic Communications concept and its relevance for France. Paris: RAND Europe.

<https://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR855z2.html>.

⁸ NATO defines four instruments of power: military, political, economic, and civil – MPEC. See: **Allied Command Operations Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive COPD Interim V2.0.** 4 October 2013. Brussels: SHAPE, pp. 1–9. [**Allied Command Operations** 2013]

⁹ **Antczak, A.; Plashkina, I.** 2017. Kultowa propaganda. Rosyjski dyskurs komunikowania politycznego w przekazie telewizyjnym stacji Pierwszy kanał. Toruń: Marszałek Publishing, p. 55. [**Antczak, Plashkina** 2017]

of ordinary Ukrainian citizens as victims of an unnecessary war in the eastern part of the country. The second dimension was related to the local population and the tools used were based on the desired effect: to gain support, to foster an impression of weak national and local authorities, to create division among the attacked society, to justify actions based on historical narrative, etc. At the same time, there were also parallel information operations aimed at the Russian population to ensure support for actions taken on Crimea and inside Ukraine. These narratives constitute an integral part of military exercises to verify their effectiveness and to be used later based on gained experiences. When discussing the war in Ukraine during the 2014 NATO Wales Summit, General Philip Breedlove, NATO's former Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), declared Russia's use of the information domain as "the most amazing information warfare *blitzkrieg* we have ever seen in the history of information warfare"¹⁰. This type of information warfare is designed to seize control over public opinion in order to serve the well-defined objectives of those who are manipulating it. In the case of Ukraine, one objective was the desire to demonstrate the will to unite an indigenous Russian nation, however, that was not achieved at the expected level. The Ukrainian conflict revealed an important phenomenon related to the information warfare: Western European societies recognized the manipulation and cynicism generated by engineered information, nevertheless, their response was muted¹¹. Their silence gave Russian propaganda an advantage and encouraged further use of such tactics as a successful and effective strategy in other cases as well. According to research led by Vladimir Sazonov for NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, the information warfare in Ukraine was discussed in more detail recognizing that "Russian and Ukrainian security narratives were close, or at least did not contradict each other"¹². The research concluded that Russian behaviour was rational and well-calculated. The study outlined the lessons learned in Georgia and determined that "Russia's information activities have played a significant role in the overall military operations" and that information activities "tend

¹⁰ **Vandiver, J.** 2014. SACEUR: Allies must prepare for Russia 'hybrid war'. – Stars and Stripes, 04 September. <<https://www.stripes.com/news/saceur-allies-must-prepare-for-russia-hybrid-war-1.301464>> (accessed: 10 April 2018).

¹¹ **Antczak, Plashkina** 2017, p. 54.

¹² **Sazonov, V. et al.** 2016. Russian Information Campaign against the Ukrainian State and Defence Forces. Riga and Tartu: NATO STRATCOM Centre of Excellence and Estonian National Defence College, p. 39. <<https://www.stratcomcoe.org/russian-information-campaign-against-ukrainian-state-and-defence-forces-0>>.

to be situational and flexible; every narrative is given an individual touch, considering all of its peculiarities”¹³.

French philosopher Jacques Ellul has argued that strong belief in and continuous use of information warfare has its roots in Soviet thinking. Ellul has posited that “the Communists, who do not believe in human nature but only in the human condition, believe that propaganda is all-powerful, legitimate (whenever they employ it), and instrumental in creating a new type of man.”¹⁴ In that context, Ellul has also recognized that “a democracy is generally poorly organised for effective psychological warfare” and further referring to French sources explained that “only the army can engage in psychological warfare, because of its structure” to create “a common perspective about the information warfare that is being performed against Russia and the counteractivities that Russia must take to win the information warfare”¹⁵. To achieve the desired effects, “Russia’s strategic communications do contain a ‘meta’ or grand narrative of sorts, i.e. a series of core themes that consistently appear in most communications efforts”¹⁶. According to Ieva Berzina, “Russia itself has a sense of being a target of aggressive informative activities coming from the West”¹⁷. Berzina’s research is based on studying the published works of such Russian authors as Sergey Rastorguev, Igor Panarin, Sergey Tkachenko, Andrei Fursov and Aleksandr Dugin. In their conceptual theses and publications, “they acknowledge and develop ideas about informative activities as an important tool for the achievement of the goals of domestic and international politics”¹⁸. For example, Tkachenko recognizes that information warfare is not only an international relations issue but it is also used for domestic purposes, indicating the “elections in Russia as the most obvious example of information warfare performed by the political elite against its own nation”¹⁹. Such narratives also include conspiracy theories, corruption, criminality, Western appetite for national resources, denying Russia’s role in history, and the objective of triggering a ‘colour revolution’ inside the country. Russia’s 2014 Military

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 113–115.

¹⁴ **Ellul, J.** 1965. *Propaganda. The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*. Vintage Books, p. xvi. [**Ellul 1965**]

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹⁶ **Missiroli et al.** 2016, p. 7.

¹⁷ **Berzina, I.** 2018. The Narrative of “Information Warfare against Russia” in Russian Academic Discourse. – *Journal of Political Marketing*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, p. 162. [**Berzina 2018**]

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 162–164.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

Doctrine²⁰ includes a few other narratives that are more security-oriented. According to Panarin, the Russophobia campaign waged by the West is part of the information warfare against Moscow and is “performed by ‘the agents of anti-Russian forces’ – governments of the Baltic countries, Georgia and Poland that have come out with provocative and impudent statements”²¹. The term ‘Russophobia’ is not new, having been introduced already back in the 19th century by Czarist statesman Fyodor Tyutchev and later popularised by Russian and Soviet authorities²².

Thus, Russia considers itself to be under attack by Western information warfare, cyber assets, and economic tools supported by political pressure. In that context, external support for the opposition in Russia (which is neither strong nor united) to build broader coalitions, is seen as part of a long-term strategy promoted by rival nations. Such pressure includes, for example, the enlargement of NATO and the EU, seemingly aiming to encircle Russia and to change its neighbours’ perception of the Kremlin. The success of this information warfare is seen in the outbreak of ‘colour revolutions’ aimed at changing the governments of countries that border Russia. American national security analyst Anthony Cordesman has explained that “Russian military officers now tied the term ‘colour revolution’ to the crisis in Ukraine and to what they saw as a new U.S. and European approach to warfare that focuses on creating destabilizing revolutions in other states as a means of serving

²⁰ **The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation approved by the President of the Russian Federation on December 25, 2014.** The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, section 12a. 29 June. <<https://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029>> (accessed: 17 March 2018) [**Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2014**], and

Военная доктрина Российской Федерации (Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation), 26 December 2014, Moscow. <<http://news.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf>> (accessed: 17 March 2018).

²¹ I. Panarin quoted in: **Berzina** 2018, p. 170.

²² **Darczewska, J.; Żochowski, P.** 2015. Russophobia in the Kremlin’s Strategy. A Weapon of Mass Destruction. – Point of View, No. 56, October. Warsaw: Centre of Eastern Studies (OSW), p. 9. <<https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/point-view/2015-11-02/russophobia-kremlins-strategy-a-weapon-mass-destruction>>.

See also: **Saunders, R.** 2014. The Geopolitics of Russophobia: The Problems and Prospects of Post-Soviet “Global Russian”. – *Globality Studies Journal*, 15 July.

<<https://gsj.stonybrook.edu/article/the-geopolitics-of-russophobia-the-problems-and-prospects-of-post-soviet-global-russian/>> (accessed: 20 June 2018);

Gigitashvili, G. 2016. The Western Media Caught in the Kremlin’s Russophobia Trap. – LIIA. Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 23 December, Riga.

<<http://liia.lv/en/analyses/the-western-media-caught-in-the-kremlins-russophobia-trap-568>> (accessed: 20 June 2018).

their security interests at low cost and with minimal casualties. It was seen as posing a potential threat to Russia in the near abroad”²³.

Moscow considers the control over mass media as critical and that desired ‘reality’ is supported by the “hundreds of millions of dollars that it spends on international broadcasters like the rolling, multilingual news channel RT (Russia Today)”²⁴. Soviet-born British journalist Peter Pomerantsev estimates that RT is powerful enough to convince Russian society of the power of its government; but, for example, in the United States it is not influential enough to compete with CNN. However, in Europe, “Russian propaganda is more potent, working alongside the Kremlin’s influence over local media as well as economic and energy pressures”²⁵. This combination of a variety of instruments of power, underpinned by information operations, is orchestrated to achieve synergies to effectively attack modern democracies. Consequently, NATO members are increasingly attacked within the information domain and all recognized vulnerabilities are exploited to weaken their shared unity. According to NATO’s own estimates, the “risks and threats to the Alliance’s territories, populations and forces will be hybrid in nature: an interconnected, unpredictable mix of traditional warfare, irregular warfare, terrorism and organised crime”²⁶ supported by disinformation and propaganda, leaving them unable to respond in a comprehensive way. To counter these threats, the alliance must “develop a culture where leaders and capabilities are well suited for irregular warfare or the hybrid threat, while simultaneously maintaining NATO’s conventional and nuclear competency”²⁷. Therefore, cooperation within NATO and the European Union will be the decisive element in mitigating weaknesses and countering such threats; closer internal consolidation of each individual Alliance member is critical as well. The

²³ **Cordesman, A.** 2014. Russia and the “Color Revolution”. – CSIS. Center for Strategic and International Studies, 28 May.
<<https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-and-%E2%80%9Ccolor-revolution%E2%80%9D>> (accessed: 20 April 2018).

²⁴ **Pomerantsev, P.** 2014. Russia and the Menace of Unreality. How Vladimir Putin is revolutionizing information warfare. – The Atlantic, 09 September.
<<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/09/russia-putin-revolutionizing-information-warfare/379880/>> (20 April 2018).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ **NATO 2009 Multiple Futures Project.** Interim Report on Security Implications, April 2009. Norfolk: Allied Command Transformation.
<http://www.act.nato.int/images/stories/events/2009/mfp/081212_-_MFP_Interim_Report_-_Final_Version.pdf> (20 April 2018).

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 9.

smaller nations, e.g. the three Baltic states and Poland, are under considerable pressure and too weak to face a complex threat alone. Therefore, it is important for the Alliance to understand that “first, we accept the fact that such external democratic propaganda can be used as a weapon, that what we are dealing with here is psychological warfare, and that we must adapt ourselves to the enemy’s train of thought; and that, proceeding from there, the people that we subject to our propaganda are not those whom we want to see become democratic but whom we want to defeat”²⁸. This requires the development of strategy and tools to counter disinformation and propaganda in order to avert any devastating effects on sovereign nations.

Russia’s 2014 Military Doctrine recognised the West as a threat. As one of the major external threats, the doctrine acknowledges the “build-up of the power potential of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and vesting NATO with global functions carried out in violation of the rules of international law, bringing the military infrastructure of NATO member countries near the borders of the Russian Federation, including by further expansion of the alliance”²⁹. It also mentions the danger of deploying military capabilities close to borders, deployment of “strategic missile defence systems” and territorial claims toward the Russian Federation. As a result, Moscow issued a warning in the form of its updated definition of war: “a war pursuing limited military-political objectives when military actions take place within the borders of the warring states and affect mainly the interests (territorial, economic, political, etc.) of these states”³⁰. The two categories of local wars apply to the three Baltic states and Poland, because the deployment of NATO troops on their territories is not acceptable for Moscow. On the other hand, the narrative of the West posing a direct threat to Russia by deploying combat forces close to its national borders is useful for Russian domestic information operations to convince its population that military investments are necessary and strong leadership is justified. In addition, the doctrine highlights the importance of the information space, as the tendency to shift military risks and threats to that space is related to influencing internal affairs³¹. That would enable exploiting all available communication technologies against the Russian population, especially younger generations, to undermine their values and to provoke tensions, radicalism, and extremism, but also to

²⁸ Ellul 1965, p. 244.

²⁹ **Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2014**, section 12a.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, section 8f.

³¹ *Ibid.*, section 11, 12 l, 13c.

instigate the establishment of illegal armed formations within Russia or its allies. With regard to its allies, the doctrine mentions the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)³² that includes Belarus that shares borders with NATO countries and is of special importance to Russia due to its geostrategic location.

In general, the existence of a common threat has a strong unifying power within societies, especially when it is underpinned by historical memory and constant media campaigns taking advantage of all possible broadcasting channels subordinated to the central government. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the build-up of military capabilities and the concentration of the military's top units in the West Military District (WMD) will continue as Russia's key message within the information domain. It is related to the information warfare focused on Eastern Europe and even on "High North, the region above the Arctic Circle"³³. Russia's Minister of Defence, Sergey Shoigu, has clearly declared to other nations that "we set quite a significant pace in our conquest of the Arctic", and as a result "we will have deployed the majority of our forces in the region, from Murmansk to Chukotka"³⁴. Nevertheless, the WMD will remain one of Russia's priorities as it is simply needed by the state now and even more so in the future. In 2015, General Gerasimov estimated that "the main effort of the Ministry of Defence will be to enhance the combat capacity of the armed forces, with a strong focus on the Crimean, Kaliningrad and Arctic concentrations"³⁵; and that focus could also be seen during the 2017 military exercises. What is more, the importance of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave between Lithuania and Poland, was highlighted quite often during major military exercises, in particular by the deployment of mobile short-range ballistic missile system 9K720 'Iskander' (in SS-26

³² Collective Security Treaty Organization, established in 2002, is an intergovernmental military alliance comprising Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

³³ **Sloggett, D.** 2015. Arctic Ambitions. – Air Force Monthly, January, p. 47.

³⁴ **Petrov, A.** 2014. Russian Bases to Span Entire Arctic Border by End of 2014. – RIA Novosti, 21 October.

<<http://rt.com/news/197936-russia-arctic-military-shoigu/>> (accessed: 17 March 2018).

³⁵ For the priorities, see: **Bender, J.** 2015b. Russia Is Constructing An Arctic Stronghold 30 Miles From The Finnish Border. – Business Insider, 14 January. <<http://www.businessinsider.com/russian-arctic-base-miles-from-finnish-border-2015-1#ixzz3OtUu9PXr>> (accessed: 15 April 2018) and

Bender, J. 2015a. Russia Is Reinforcing 3 Crucial Geopolitical Frontlines. – Business Insider, 13 January.

<<http://www.businessinsider.com/russia-reinforcing-geopolitical-frontlines-2015-1>> (accessed: 15 April 2018).

‘Stone’), capable of carrying nuclear warheads, and also by the persistent violation of air spaces and the Economic Exclusive Zones of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Additionally, it constitutes a part of the anti-access/area denial (AA/AD) concept and the consistent display of actual capabilities able to deny NATO freedom of movement and flow of reinforcement in case of rapid aggression, which would give Russia enough time to achieve limited operational objectives. According to Stephen Blank, “it would be relatively easy for Moscow to launch an invasion during one of its vaunted snap exercises without the United States detecting it in time”³⁶. What is more, all activities and decisions are skilfully supported by mass media, demonstrating military capabilities and political will.

The AA/AD potential enlargement must be acknowledged, as “Russia would be capable of not just sealing off the Baltic states in the ‘bubble’ that covers air, sea and land dimensions, but also of fiercely contesting other spaces of critical importance to military operations – in the electromagnetic spectrum, cyberspace, and even outer space (by using anti-satellite capabilities)”³⁷. By reinforcing the Kaliningrad exclave, occupying Crimea and developing Arctic capabilities, Russia is enhancing its AA/AD shield contributing to “an increasingly unpredictable and unstable Euro-Atlantic security environment. In response, NATO has taken defensive measures to protect and assure its members and will continue to do so as long as necessary”³⁸. This constant demonstration of capabilities is an integral part of information warfare, inciting fear and ambiguity and undermining the will of some Western nations to engage with Russia. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have been recognized as possible areas that could be the next targets for annexation, according to Russia’s international policy of using military power as a tool. The Chief of Staff of the Estonian Defence Forces, Lieutenant General Riho Terras, has expressed it very directly stating that “in the long term, Russia’s wish is to bring the Baltic Sea and the passages leading to it more and more under its control, and to control it much like it

³⁶ **Blank, S.** 2016. Counting Down to a Russian Invasion of the Baltics. – Newsweek, 01 December. <<http://www.newsweek.com/counting-down-russian-invasion-baltics-414877>> (accessed: 20 March 2018).

³⁷ **Clark, W.; Luik, J.; Ramms, E.; Shirreff, R.** 2016. Closing NATO’s Baltic Gap. Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, pp. 12–13. <<https://icds.ee/closing-natos-baltic-gap>> [Clark *et al.* 2016]

³⁸ NATO 2016 **The Secretary General’s Annual Report 2015**. 2016. Brussels: NATO, p. 19. <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_127529.htm>.

does the Black Sea”³⁹. According to former Estonian Minister of Defence, Hannes Hanso, this kind of behaviour is a reason “to keep our eyes open in the air, on the water, and everywhere else”⁴⁰.

Douglas Barrie from the International Institute for Strategic Studies has stated that “following Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, the assessment of Moscow’s military modernisation and its introduction and deployment of improved conventional systems has been increasingly accompanied by voices within NATO cautioning that an anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) strategy was not just a consideration for the Asia-Pacific or the Gulf regions. In addition to Crimea, the Baltic region is vulnerable or suited – depending on perspective – to such an approach. Senior NATO officials, including General Philip Breedlove, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and General Frank Gorenc, Commander of Allied Air Command, have raised concerns over AA/AD in a European context during 2015”⁴¹. One example could be the potential advantage to be gained by occupying the Estonian island of Saaremaa to complete the AA/AD shield; thus, isolating the three Baltic countries entirely, while also endangering Sweden and Finland. The threat perception is present in the region and there is a clear understanding that the isolation threat is a real one. Consequently, it is of vital importance to deter Moscow from annexing any part of the Baltic region because fighting back to regain those territories and to restore independent nations would be extremely costly and time-consuming.

3. The Role of Military Might in Supporting Information Warfare

Moscow has been using the ‘hybrid’ approach very skilfully, focusing on the comprehensive use of political and military domains, supported by the fostering of constant uncertainty regarding its military intentions and developments. The ongoing nature of its exercises and large-scale mobilizations is

³⁹ **Terras: Russia demonstrating wish to control Baltic Sea area** 2016. – Eesti Rahvusringhääling, 07 October. <<http://news.err.ee/v/news/2bd72ff4-396e-4e61-897a-d8bfe903e6c8/terras-russia-demonstrating-wish-to-control-baltic-sea-area>> (accessed: 21 February 2018).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ **Barrie, D.** 2016. Douglas Barrie: Russia and anti-access/area-denial capabilities. – Military Balance Blog. International Institute for Strategic Studies, 08 February 2016. <<http://www.iiss.org/en/militarybalanceblog/blogsections/2016-629e/february-f0ed/russia-and-anti-access-area-denial-capabilities-9b3e>> (accessed: 22 February 2018).

a means to maintain pressure on the West and convince the Russian population that the country is powerful enough to ward off aggression. This strategy is constantly verified and trained in the framework of snap exercises with the goal of conducting all types of operations, including those of a ‘hybrid’ nature. Such strategic thinking has the potential to facilitate a comprehensive multi-institutional approach and “if implemented as planned – should greatly improve Russia’s speed of reaction and information exchange, assisting in honing its coordinated capabilities for hostile action still further”⁴². The remodeling of Russia’s military command and control system was done through the establishment of four military districts to respond to the evolving security situation resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union and to redirect the military structure toward new threats. The renewed quality of Russia’s command and control system, as well as the modernization of its armed forces, has been recognized by other nations and there is no intent or attempt to challenge Russia in a conventional manner. The Kremlin is aware that a military attack is unlikely and is more concerned about other countries utilizing non-conventional approaches against it. This could include a foreign attempt to instigate a ‘colour revolution’. Furthermore, NATO is in essence a defensive security organization, meaning it will never attack Russia and this fact is recognized by both sides. However, that does not stop Moscow from provoking and challenging the Alliance. Viljar Veebel, a researcher at the Baltic Defence College, estimates that “Russia’s general aim is to devalue NATO’s credibility and to increase Russia’s negative ‘bargaining power’ in the international arena, as well as to respond to any regional initiatives of the Alliance with its own respective activities and interventions”⁴³.

In addition, Russia has also been modifying its defence force structure, after revising the initial focus on the creation of independent and more powerful battalion task forces and brigades subordinated to military districts. This was exemplified by the recreation of the 1st Guards Tank Army in the West Military District, reorganization of the 20th Army and the decision to create three new divisions based on existing combat, combat support and combat service

⁴² **Giles, K.** 2016. Russia’s ‘New’ Tools for Confronting the West Continuity and Innovation in Moscow’s Exercise of Power. March 2016. London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs Chatham House, pp. 26–27.
<<https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/russias-new-tools-confronting-west>> (accessed: 22 February 2018).

⁴³ **Veebel, V.** 2018. NATO options and dilemmas for deterring Russia in the Baltic States. – Defense Studies, Vol. 12, Issue 2, p. 230. [Veebel 2018]

support units⁴⁴. These developments indicate that Russia's military reform is ongoing and the lessons learned from the snap exercises are implemented to establish structures that meet expectations and operational needs. One of the conclusions of the snap exercises was that brigades do not possess enough combat power and as such, are not able to conduct independent operations in separate avenues of approach. The solution was the professionalization of the armed forces in order to reduce reliance on conscripts and to shift toward contract non-commissioned officers, in conjunction with more time spent during exercises to train soldiers and to consolidate units. Large-scale exercises such as Zapad or Caucasus have proven to be well-suited for that purpose. Nevertheless, the issue is still the optimal number of qualified candidates for military service and dealing with competition as the newly created National Guard has similar needs. The scenarios and scale of the snap exercises have surprised Western observers, as they have incorporated nuclear strike options, as well as rapid deployment and concentration of forces not only within a single military district but also across districts throughout the vast territory of the country. Moreover, the deployment of air and land force units to Syria proved that Russia's force projection capabilities are growing; and although these capabilities are limited compared to the U.S., they surpass those of European nations. All these developments are supported, despite Russia's dire economic situation, by consistent funding and the commitment of the national leadership to keeping the pace of this modernization campaign. The creation of the National Guard supports the concept of non-linear war or hybrid warfare, recognising that in case of hostilities the entire Russian territory would be under attack using a variety of capabilities. In that case, the National Guard would be responsible for ensuring territorial defence and the security of critical infrastructure, allowing the armed forces to engage the enemy with full combat power.

Russia used its armed forces as a component of information warfare at the end of August 2016 when the unexpected verification of combat power units⁴⁵ was used as a demonstration against the outcome of NATO's Warsaw

⁴⁴ For a more detailed discussion see: **Carik, J.; Sivinckij, A.** 2016. Беларусь в контексте противостояния Россия–НАТО. Минск: Центр стратегических и внешнеполитических исследований (Center for Strategic and Foreign Policy), с. 5–9.

⁴⁵ **Внезапная проверка объявлена в трех военных округах, Северном флоте, ВКС и ВДВ** 2016. – Tass News Agency, 25 August. <<http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/3565111>> (accessed: 12 April 2018).

Putin orders snap checks in Russian armed forces August 25–31. – Tass News Agency, 25 August 2016. <<http://tass.com/defense/895849>> (accessed: 12 April 2018).

Summit and the Alliance's decision to deploy four battalions to Eastern Europe. The scale of Russia's snap check exercises was to prove that the deployment of multinational battalions constitutes a minor combat power compared to the Kremlin's readiness to mobilize not only military but also non-military capacities in a short time to conduct large-scale operations to achieve the desired end state. From 25 to 31 August, selected units from Russia's three military districts (Central, Western, Southern MDs), the Northern Fleet, Aerospace Forces and Airborne Troops were put into full combat readiness. It was also a precondition for the strategic level command-staff exercise of the Southern Military District codenamed "Caucasus 2016", in which some 12,500 troops, supported by aviation and heavy equipment, took part. Soon after, in the beginning of October 2016, it was followed by another large-scale four-day exercise to verify the capacity of Russia's civil defence. The involvement of as many as 200,000 emergency personnel and the co-operation of 40 million civilians nationwide was a test to coordinate a variety of services in emergency scenarios suited for the levels of threat assessment for specific regions. The aim was to be "properly prepared in the event of a nuclear, chemical and biological attack from the West"⁴⁶. This comprehensive approach to operations involving all national assets is supported by the newly created Russian National Defense Control Center⁴⁷ (NDCC), comparable to the wartime *Stavka*⁴⁸ from the past.

The nuclear aspect was incorporated during many exercises within overall scenarios or just as snap exercises of nuclear strategic forces. This is in line with Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine, which describes nuclear capabilities as an "important factor of preventing an outbreak of nuclear military conflicts involving the use of conventional arms"⁴⁹. The challenge is that nuclear power could be employed in both a large-scale war and in a regional

⁴⁶ **Payton, M.** 2016. Russia launches massive nuclear war training exercise with '40 million people'. – The Independent, 05 October. <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-nuclear-weapon-training-attack-radiation-moscow-vladimir-putin-a7345461.html>> (accessed: 12 April 2018).

⁴⁷ Also known as National Defense Management Center (Russian: *Национальный центр управления обороной Российской Федерации*) is the supreme command and control center of the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Russian Armed Forces. **Vladimir Putin's massive, triple-decker war room revealed.** – **Washington Post, 21 November 2015.** <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/11/21/vladimirputins-massive-triple-decker-war-room-revealed>> (accessed: 03 March 2018).

⁴⁸ High command of the armed forces in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

⁴⁹ **Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2014**, para 16, 21c, 27.

war. Therefore, the nuclear deterrence factor plays a substantial role, having been revealed during military drills that indicate the readiness of the nuclear triad and the existence of political will to use such a weapon when necessary. Additionally, it was visible, but not officially proven, that during Zapad 2009 (and according to Polish newspaper *Polska Times* also in 2013) a “pre-emptive nuclear attack on Warsaw is among the variants of the [Russian military] exercises”⁵⁰. Although not confirmed, the message is part of the information warfare causing some concerns, especially considering that the Zapad 2009 exercise took place shortly after the 2008 August War in Georgia and the Caucasus 2016 was conducted shortly before the war in Ukraine. It could be read as a warning in response to any decisive actions from NATO and Western nations towards Russia. In that context, it is important to consider the Russian presence in Syria as it enabled to demonstrate its capabilities, although limited, to deploy troops at short notice out of the country using air and naval assets. It was also a presentation of new weapons systems and offered the opportunity to test them in combat along with verifying tactics in asymmetric and conventional confrontation. Newly developed Unmanned Ground Vehicles (UGVs) were tested there in real combat conditions to gain experience for further development, and the ‘Uran 6’ UGV complex was tested in mine clearing operations in North Caucasus and Palmyra.⁵¹ There is unconfirmed information about the use of the UGVs ‘Platforma-M’ and ‘Argo’ in combat, and if true, it would be a step toward their broader use by the armed forces.

4. Zapad 2017 as Part of Information Operations

Military exercise Zapad 2017 demonstrated Russia’s interest to preserve its influence in its so-called “near abroad” as the exercise scenario was directed towards Belarus. It was also a message to Western nations that Belarus is and will remain within Russia’s sphere of influence. For the Baltic nations, it demonstrated that Russia has proven capacity to employ and deploy significant military capabilities at short notice to both isolate and conquer the Baltics

⁵⁰ **Polska Times: Belarus to rehearse nuclear attack on Warsaw** 2013. – UDF.BY, 05 April. <<https://udf.by/english/news-subjects/77732-polska-times-belarus-to-rehearse-nuclear-attack-on-warsaw.html>> (accessed: 23 April 2018). [**Polska Times** 2013]

⁵¹ **Warriors of Steel: Meet Russia’s Robot Army** 2016. – Sputnik News, 29 May. <<https://sputniknews.com/military/201605291040446567-russian-battle-robots-video/>> (accessed: 22 April 2018).

before NATO would be ready to act decisively enough to counter such an attempt. Furthermore, it is significant that the territories of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania were included in the exercise scenario as a source of threat, leading to the destabilization of the scenario's fictional country that was set within Belarusian borders. That type of scenario is not new: as early as October 2013, during the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)⁵² exercise "Unbreakable Brotherhood 2013", illegal groups infiltrated a fictional CSTO member 'Uralia'. The conflict originated from "historical territorial, interethnic and religious contradictions as well as economic ones"⁵³. It enabled testing antiterrorist scenarios and later, for the concentration of troops close to the Ukrainian border, to practice that scenario in combat⁵⁴. This military scenario is not likely now, but following Gerasimov's 'new generation warfare' concept⁵⁵, the threat still exists and refers to non-military instruments of power⁵⁶. Russia's military exercise Zapad 2017 served to pressure Eastern Europe into acknowledging that Belarus can potentially be used as a staging area for military operations, which would significantly complicate NATO's defence abilities and put Poland in a very vulnerable geostrategic position. The challenge is that Russia maintains its right to use nuclear assets not only to respond to a nuclear attack but also "in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy"⁵⁷.

The Zapad 2017 exercise comprised several dimensions: it was part of a continued response to NATO's activities in the vicinity of Russia's borders; it arose from the need to preserve its influence in its own neighbourhood, namely Belarus; and to maintain pressure on the Baltic nations and Poland. The Zapad 2017 exercise scenario officially recognized the threat of a "colour revolution" in the north-west part of Belarus. The radical elements were supposed to come from the current territories of Poland, Lithuania and

⁵² Collective Security Treaty Organization, established in 2002, is an intergovernmental military alliance comprising Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

⁵³ **Kocera, J.** 2013. CSTO Peacekeepers Drill in Russia, Preparing For What? – Eurasianet, 9 October. <<https://eurasianet.org/s/csto-peacekeepers-drill-in-russia-preparing-for-what>> (accessed: 21 March 2018).

⁵⁴ **Stróżyk, J.** 2017. Zapad 2017 – kolejne antynatowskie ćwiczenie SZ Rosji. – Fundacja Stratpoints, pp. 2–3.

⁵⁵ **Герасимов** 2013, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ NATO recognizes four national instruments of power: military, political, economic, and civil – MPEC. See: **Allied Command Operations** 2013, pp. 1–9.

⁵⁷ **Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2014**, para 27.

Latvia and for that purpose, fictional countries were created there as part of the scenario. Politically, this sent a clear message that these nations are recognized as unfriendly towards Moscow. According to the assessment by Stanisław Koziej, the former head of the National Security Bureau of Poland, “the location of military exercises is always a form of political declaration”⁵⁸. Another important element was the clear message aimed at the leadership of Belarus, indicating that Russia will never give up that important nation nor allow it to close ranks with the West. From a geostrategic point of view, it would put Russia in a vulnerable situation, allowing NATO and the EU to encircle its western border. Consequently, Kaliningrad’s role would be significantly complicated and its military significance diminished, causing Russia to lose face, thus thwarting its drive to reinstate itself as a great power. The exercise showed that, in the framework of the CSTO charter, Moscow is in a position to support Minsk “in the spheres of protection of state frontiers”⁵⁹, based on the interpretation of that agreement.

The Zapad 2017 exercise put pressure on Eastern Europe by demonstrating Russia’s military capabilities and readiness to initiate operations at short notice. Although the focus of the attention was on the Belarusian aspect of the drills, most of the major deployments during Zapad 2017 were conducted in the Western Military District and in the Arctic⁶⁰. The official statements focused on the Belarusian leg of the overall drills and it was an important component of information warfare, especially as “it is much more advantageous to use Belarus as a springboard for constant escalation of the situation at the borders with the EU and Ukraine”⁶¹. The message of using Belarus as the exercise area was accepted by academics and the real scale was adjusted after the exercise to include the extent of activities conducted in the Western Military District and the Arctic. One important factor was

⁵⁸ **Polska Times** 2013, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ **Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization**, para 8.

<http://www.odkb-csto.org/documents/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=1896> (accessed: 23 April 2018).

⁶⁰ For example see: **Stormark, K.** 2017. Russian forces exercised attack on Svalbard. – AldriMer.no, 18 October.

<<https://www.aldrimer.no/russian-forces-exercised-attack-on-svalbard/>> (accessed: 23 October 2017).

⁶¹ **How to run Zapad-2017 with 13 000 people: To dispel Russian propaganda theories** 2017. – InfoNapalm, 23 September. <<https://informnapalm.org/en/run-zapad-2017-13-000-people-dispel-russian-propaganda-theories/>> (accessed: 14 May 2018). [**How to run Zapad-2017**]

that the presidents of Russia and Belarus observed the exercise separately in their respective countries. Usually such high-intensity military exercises are used to demonstrate unity and cooperation through the joint presence of key political and military leaders during visitors and observers' day. The fact that Presidents Putin and Lukashenka observed the drills in different locations raises questions about their relationship and is worthy of further examination in the future. The military side of the drills was also of great importance, sending many important signals to the political-military leadership of Western nations. First of all, it was a reminder that Russia has modernized its armed forces and has been training them extensively for a new type of warfare. This warrants serious consideration because this transformation entailed significant effort and investments. The exercise clearly demonstrated Russia's new capabilities and readiness to act decisively outside its territory in a limited timeframe based on a very short chain of command and decision-making cycle, allowing for well-coordinated utilization of all available national assets.

Another important aspect was the demonstration of quite significant progress made in Electronic Warfare (EW) capabilities tested in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria and presented during the Zapad 2017 exercise. Some 1,500 soldiers from EW units trained using new equipment such as "Sagittarius target acquisition complex and the RB-109A Bylina EW system"⁶² that is able to influence any electronic equipment far beyond Russia's western borders. The electronic warfare capabilities were verified in August 2016 during the Elektron 2016 exercise "involving EW forces from across all service branches and arms"⁶³. The importance of such capabilities is quite significant and poses a real challenge for NATO, potentially affecting its technological advantages. According to Roger McDermott "the paradigm shift in Russia's approach to warfighting to one similar to NATO's and the adoption of EW as a key enabler through networked C2 and integration of these very capable threat systems, coupled with advanced Information

⁶² **Boulègue, M.** 2017. Five Things to Know About the Zapad-2017 Military Exercise. – Chatham House. The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 25 September. <<https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/five-things-know-about-zapad-2017-military-exercise#>> (accessed: 23 May 2018).

⁶³ **McDermott, R.** 2017. Russia's Electronic Warfare Capabilities to 2025. Challenging NATO in the Electromagnetic Spectrum. September 2017. Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, p. 7. <<https://icds.ee/russias-electronic-warfare-capabilities-to-2025-challenging-nato-in-the-electromagnetic-spectrum/>>.

Warfare, could level the playing field between NATO and Russia very quickly in any future conflict”⁶⁴.

Electronic warfare is another important component under the AA/AD umbrella, requiring possession of counter-assets in eastern NATO countries to reduce the threat. The emphasis on using such a sophisticated weapon in “those exercises suggests that EW capabilities are beginning to occupy a growing and qualitatively new role in Russia’s military-strategic thinking after the start of its involvement in Ukraine and Syria”⁶⁵. Thus, Zapad 2017 serves as an important example for testing new systems and to integrating them more effectively into operational concepts and all the services. This included the launching of the capable ‘Topol-M’ intercontinental ballistic missiles (NATO name SS-27) and the more advanced SR-24 ‘Yars’ (NATO name SS-27 Mod2) in September 2017⁶⁶. These tests continued in October 2017, demonstrating that any country in Europe is within their range and at risk of direct attack. One ‘Topol-M’ missile was launched from the Plesetsk cosmodrome in northern Russia to hit a target at the Kura military testing range on the Kamchatka Peninsula. Two others were launched from a nuclear powered submarine of the Pacific Fleet located on the Sea of Okhotsk to attack targets in the Arkhangelsk Oblast and another one from a Northern Fleet submarine located on the Barents Sea to reach a target on the Kamchatka Peninsula⁶⁷. These tests revealed the improved accuracy of rocket systems and enhanced targeting procedures and served several objectives: firstly, to test missiles and secondly, to demonstrate nuclear deterrence capabilities based on the principles related to nuclear triad strike potential as outlined in Russia’s 2014 Military Doctrine. The message was strengthened by testing cruise missiles with strategic bombers Tu-160, Tu-95MS and Tu-22M3. These tests, especially with regard to attacking targets in Syria using sea-based ‘Kalibr’ and

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶⁵ **Sukhankin, S.** 2017. Russia Tests EW Capabilities Ahead of Zapad 2017. – Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 14, Issue 108, 08 September. <<https://jamestown.org/program/russia-tests-ew-capabilities-ahead-of-zapad-2017/>> (accessed: 23 May 2018).

⁶⁶ **Gady, F. S.** 2017. Russia Tests Topol-M Intercontinental Ballistic Missile. – The Diplomat, 28 September. <<https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/russia-tests-topol-m-intercontinental-ballistic-missile/>> (accessed: 23 March 2018).

⁶⁷ **Russia Holds Strategic Forces Drills with Launches of Ballistic Missiles (VIDEO)** 2017. – The Sputnik News, 26 October. <<https://sputniknews.com/russia/201710261058575062-russia-nuclear-forces-drills/>> (accessed: 23 March 2018).

air-launched KH-55 missiles, are additional proof of powerful deterrence potential. As Russia modernizes its nuclear arsenal and openly demonstrates its capabilities, it is sending a clear message to potential enemies, especially to NATO and China, about its readiness to deter them convincingly in the long-term. The threat of using nuclear or even chemical weapons on the territory of the Baltic countries or Poland is limited, because there is a sizeable Russian minority in those countries and it would run against Russia's national policy toward its own citizens abroad. Also, these countries are of "territorial proximity and Russia's most likely further ambition to legitimate the annexation come into play"⁶⁸. Furthermore, the effects of Chernobyl have not faded and St. Petersburg is also not that far away.

5. *Maskirovka* as a Tool of Deception

The presentation of new or significantly upgraded weapons systems was an important factor in demonstrating the progress made in the modernization of the Russian armed forces, especially considering that progress has been delayed. Such demonstrations are part of the so-called *maskirovka*, a form of military deception used by Russia, covering a broad range of measures from camouflage to disinformation aimed at misleading the opponents; along with prepared information and officially available data intended to confuse Western experts, and enabling a demonstration of power and progress while concealing actual deficiencies and problems. The delays in the modernization of Russian armed forces have been detectable. For example, the fifth generation aircraft Sukhoi Su-57 is still not in units; T-14 "Armata" will not be available to land forces in the expected numbers; 2S35 'Koalitsiya-SV' is postponed until 2020; there are no plans to purchase major surface navy ships; not to mention other symptoms of deficiencies. Nevertheless, Russia should never be underestimated, because it remains a strong regional actor with global ambitions. Among the new platforms that Russia presented in the framework of the Zapad 2017 exercise, were T-90M tanks armed with T-14 cannons with 125mm 2A82-1M guns (the same as in T-14); 'Afghanit' active protection system and fire control system 'Kalina'. In addition, they showed T-90BVM with GTD-1250TF gas turbine engine and BMPT 'Terminator' designed to support tanks and AFV in urban areas. This is an indication of Russia's capabilities but also reveals some issues as T-90

⁶⁸ Veebel 2018, p. 236.

is a modern variant of T-72 and BMPT has been delayed for some years. T-14 has still not been used in exercises, but has been displayed in military parades, although in smaller numbers as only four tanks participated in the 2018 Victory Day parade in Moscow. Moreover, nuclear shells-capable 2S7 'Pion' self-propelled guns are back in service to ensure long-range artillery capabilities. Also, Russian MRAPs (Mine Resistant Ambush Protected) type KamAZ-63968 "Tajfun-K" or Urał-63095 "Tajfun-U" have been proven to be too expensive, leading to the temporary solution of the Kamaz-5350-379 armoured truck. The weapon-related announcements are actually a means for sowing information confusion, one example being the aircraft launched KH-47M2 "Kinzhal" hypersonic complex designed to strike targets located within 2000 km (Figure 2).

Some information was revealed when presenting new strategic systems in March 2018⁶⁹. The concept is dangerous, as in combination with 'Iskander', 'Kalibr', 'Topol-M' it could reach all the important military bases, airfields and seaports critical for NATO reinforcements coming from the U.S. However, the information could just be another component of the disinformation campaign as it is not clear at what stage of development the system is, but there are concerns about the necessary capabilities to counteract it, which could be expensive and time-consuming to develop. There is similar uncertainty linked to the anti-ship hypersonic cruise missile 3M22 'Tsirkon', which could be mounted on corvettes and frigates⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ **Palowski, J.** 2018. "Hipersoniczny" Kindzał zagrożeniem dla Europy [OPINIA]. – Defence24, 10 May. <<http://www.defence24.pl/hipersoniczny-kindzal-zagrozeniem-dla-europy-opinia>> (accessed: 14 May 2018). [Palowski 2018]

⁷⁰ **Противокорабельная ракета «Циркон» разогналась до восьми скоростей звука** 2017. – InfoPortal.ru, 15 April. <<https://infoportalru.ru/protivokorabelnaya-raketa-cirkon-razognalas-do-vosmi-skorostej-zvuka.html>> (accessed: 14 May 2018);

3M22 Tsirkon Hypersonic Missile to be Fitted Aboard Russian Navy Corvettes & Frigates 2017. – Navy Recognition, 28 December.

<<http://www.navyrecognition.com/index.php/news/defence-news/2017/december-2017-navy-naval-forces-defense-industry-technology-maritime-security-global-news/5825-3m22-tsirkon-hypersonic-missile-to-be-fitted-aboard-russian-navy-corvettes-frigates.html>> (accessed: 14 May 2018).

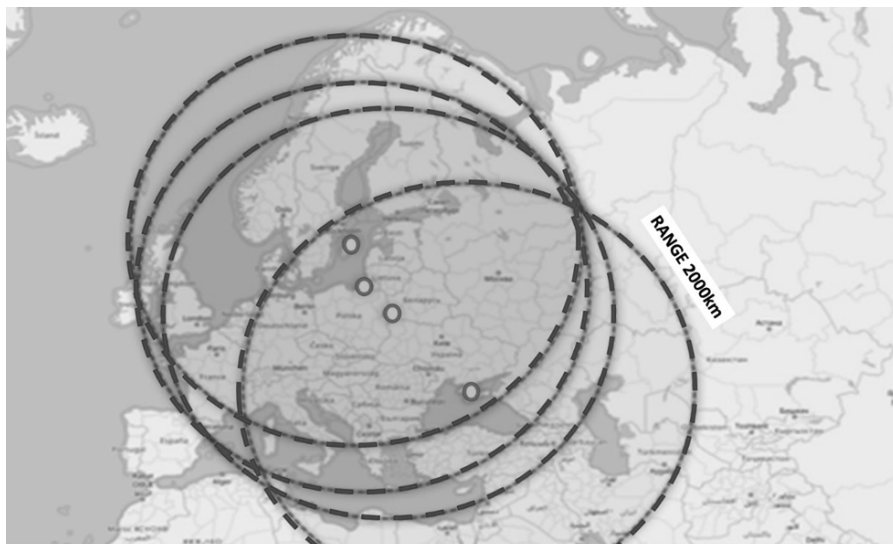


Figure 2. The range of KH-47M2 'Kinzhal' hypersonic complex as part of AA/AD concept⁷¹

The Zapad 2017 exercise was also clearly a test of Russia's upgraded military command and control system. From the military perspective, Russian armed forces have established a very clear and direct chain of command, allowing them to launch operations at short notice and denying NATO enough time to react with sufficient capabilities. This is underpinned by Russia's National Defense Control Center (NDCC) as "a new mechanism in the operation of the state defense"⁷². The NDCC monitors the situation in the country and shares information among all security-related national authorities, making it the key to ensuring early warning indicators and a comprehensive approach to national defence using all instruments of power in a concerted manner. In addition, Russia also utilises its 'hybrid warfare' instruments to destabilize its neighbours on the one hand, and to enhance its own propaganda potential on the other. There are also opinions, based on recent conflicts in the

⁷¹ **Palowski** 2018.

⁷² **Vershinin, A.** 2016. Russia's military command center: Sending orders from the heart of Moscow. – Russia Beyond, 04 January.
<https://www.rbth.com/defence/2016/01/04/russias-military-command-center-sending-orders-from-the-heart-of-moscow_555889> (accessed: 27 April 2018);

Russia Opens New National Defense Control Center: Tech Savvy and Prompt 2014. – Sputnik News, Military and Intelligence, 01 December.

<<https://sputniknews.com/military/201412011015358641/>> (accessed: 27 April 2018).

neighbouring countries, that “Russia is already using a consistent strategy to ‘test the preparedness’ of its neighbours and to initiate regional conflicts with an interval of only some years”⁷³. Moreover, the “extent of the Russian information campaign related to Zapad 2017 shows that Moscow is continuing an ongoing propaganda war against NATO and Ukraine”⁷⁴.

The deployment of units to Belarus in the framework of the Zapad 2017 exercise, although limited in numbers, proved that Russia has an operational network of roads and railways, enabling the movement of troops across different military districts to rapidly concentrate significant capabilities for conducting offensive operations or to enhance defence combat power in a specific operational direction. The system supports the sustainment of armed forces, facilitating their swift operations, including “technical coverage” such as military roads, evacuation, reparation and repair of defective equipment and weapons, deployment of a field trunk pipeline, as well as areas of mass refuelling technology”⁷⁵. Time, as an operational factor, plays an important role as it supports two other factors: space and force, all aimed at curtailing NATO’s reaction time. However, Russia’s real military capabilities remain unclear, because international observers had limited access to exercise sites and the data came mainly from Russian sources, meaning that it could be a part of *maskirovka* to hide the real potential in that domain.

6. Conclusions

Russia’s snap military exercises and other provocative military activities, such as conducting manoeuvres in the vicinity of other sovereign air spaces and territorial waters, are likely to continue in the near future to continue the demonstration of its military capabilities. The Zapad exercises will play a specific role in terms of size/scope, number of troops and scenarios, continuing to pressure NATO members in Eastern Europe, especially the Baltic states and Poland. This high level of intensity has been evident since Minister of Defence, Sergey Shoygu and Chief of General Staff, Valery Gerasimov took leadership of Russia’s armed forces. The most recent strategic level exercise held in 2017 was a clear message that Russia is ready

⁷³ Veebel 2018, p. 235.

⁷⁴ Dwyer, A. M. 2017. The Importance of the Zapad 2017 Exercises. – Bulletin No. 86, 21 September. The Polish Institute of International Affairs, p. 2.
<http://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=23564> (accessed: 27 April 2018).

⁷⁵ How to run Zapad-2017, *op. cit.*

and capable of conducting joint operations to deny any direct conventional or asymmetric threat coming from its near abroad/neighbourhood. It also demonstrated Russia's capabilities to decisively counter any aggressive move from NATO and confirmed the strategy of the AA/AD umbrella spreading from the Arctic down to the Black Sea and even deeper in the South. Moreover, it was linked with concepts of deterrence by denial and by punishment based on openly presented combat power. With regard to its own people, Russia managed to prove that it is not afraid of aggression because of its capable armed forces and keeps spreading the impression of being surrounded by adversaries that are trying to undermine its national integrity using both conventional and hybrid-type methods. The Russian forces deployed to Belarus, the West Military District and the Arctic have established strong coverage of the western national borders facing not only NATO, but also non-NATO countries, causing concern in Finland and Sweden. This, in turn, will influence their decisions to join the Alliance and to allow NATO's armed forces to use their airspace, seaports and airbases and other infrastructure. Similarly, a strong message is being sent to the Russian diaspora, especially to its radical elements, preserving the narrative about a powerful Russian nation that is capable of seizing control of the whole region at short notice, even when responding to external intervention or real threat. Military exercises like Zapad 2017 include significant elements of *maskirovka*, or deception, designed to hide weaknesses and to show strengths, creating uncertainty about its real capabilities and intentions, especially since such large-scale exercises like the Zapad series could be easily transformed into aggression along western or southern avenues of approach. Therefore, *maskirovka* carries not only a military role, but also political intent toward the governments of NATO members, aiming to undermine their unity by showing that they could be challenged any time.

The effect of Russia's continuous use of the information domain and demonstrations of power are forcing the West to react in order to counter military (NATO) and non-military threats (EU). This is also done in order to convince European societies, especially those in Central and Eastern Europe, that there is unity and the capability to react on time if the probability of aggression increases. The need to counter Russia's disinformation and propaganda is about winning or losing in the information domain not only within democratic countries but also within political and military alliances. This is related to the need to make decisive and cohesive statements during summits, missions, and official meetings, and correspondingly, the necessity of investing in military capabilities to meet NATO's 2% spending level. The key

counter-messages are NATO's military presence in Eastern Europe, which includes large-scale joint military exercises, Enhanced Forward Presence task forces and NATO Force Integration Units. However, it is not only about money: it must be underpinned by systematic and prioritized development of capabilities to increase the deterrence effect and supported by resilience in all domains of modern democratic societies. What is more, it should not be forgotten that Russia has significant conventional supremacy and, according to some experts⁷⁶, is capable of occupying the entire Baltic region at short notice and denying NATO's rapid response. Such a move would slow down readiness for credible defence operations, forcing a shift to costly counter-offensive measures to restore NATO borders and to rebuild its credibility as a security organization. This is why the deployment and constant presence of NATO units is critical for maintaining reliable deterrence, along with the capabilities to rapidly deploy follow-on forces, including suppression of Russia's multidimensional AA/AD capabilities. It is based on warnings and indicators allowing rapid increase of combat power on NATO's Eastern flank during crisis, whereas it would prove more complicated in case of outbreak of war. However, those are not easy to predict as snap exercises could rapidly turn into an annexation of the Baltic nations and part of Poland, which would severely limit allied reaction time. In this context, information warfare is of critical importance as the constant and strong messages in the spirit of solidarity will affect any risky move from Russia against any NATO and EU member.

⁷⁶ See: **Shlapak, David A.** 2017. Detering Russian Aggression in the Baltic States: What it Takes to Win. CT-467. Testimony presented before the United States House of Representatives Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces on March 1, 2017. <<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS25/20170301/105608/HHRG-115-AS25-Wstate-ShlapakD-20170301.pdf>>; **Testimony of David A. Shlapak before the Committee on Armed Services Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces United States House of Representatives** 2017. 1 March, Washington; **Praks, H.** 2015. Hybrid or Not: Detering and Defeating Russia's Ways of Warfare in the Baltics – the Case of Estonia. – Research Paper No 124, December 2015. Rome: NATO Defence College Rome; **Clark et al.** 2016, *op. cit.*; **Shirreff, R.** 2016. War with Russia, London: Coronet Books.

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Col. (Ret.), Prof. **ZDZISŁAW ŚLIWA**

Dr. habil., Dean of the Baltic Defence College, Tartu, Estonia, and Professor at the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław, Poland.

ANNA ANTCZAK

Dr. habil., Associate Professor at the University of Economics and Human Sciences, Warsaw, Poland.