



ASSESSING THE COLD WAR'S NEW FRONT LINE

August 2016

SIMULATION BACKGROUND



Earlier this year, the RAND Corporation published [the results](#) of a series of wargames designed to test NATO's ability to fulfill its Article V commitments to the Baltic states. The scenario posited a conventional Russian invasion of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia – and concluded that in all circumstances, Russian forces would be poised to lay siege to each nation's capital within 60 hours of a decision to employ force. No team playing the role of NATO was able to prevent such an outcome using available forces. The RAND report added weight to those voices calling for NATO to move additional conventional forces into the Baltic in order to strengthen deterrence. At the recent NATO summit in Warsaw, the Alliance did just that.

In the run-up to the summit, inspired by the RAND report, Wikistrat sought to contribute to the ongoing debate by providing additional insights and examining alternative interpretations of the report's key elements.

SIMULATION DESIGN



In 2016, Wkistrat ran a red-teaming exercise “Assessing the Cold War’s New Frontline”. The Wikistrat simulation involved 50 analysts from 20 countries – including Russia, Estonia, Moldova, Ukraine, the United States and Germany. A third of participants held a PhD in a relevant field – e.g., Russia, military affairs, energy security, Europe and technological trends.

The simulation proceeded across two distinct phases:



In the first phase, analysts were tasked with identifying key assumptions in the RAND report and examining whether any major assumption was open to an alternative interpretation.

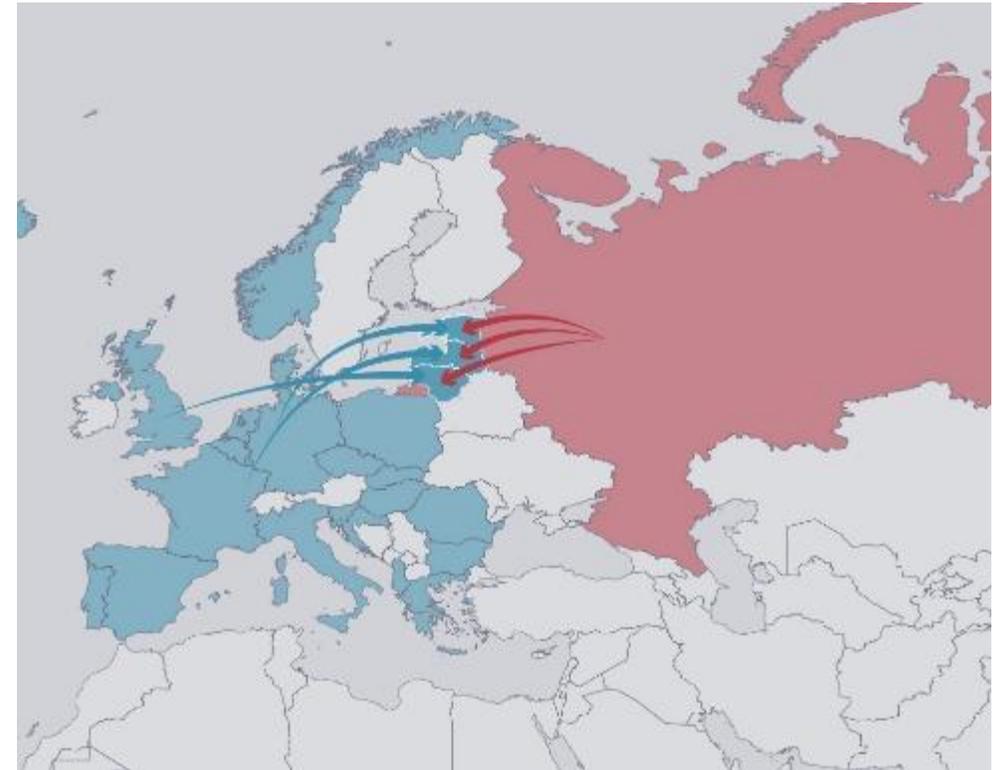


In the second phase, analysts were tasked with considering the recommendations put forward in the RAND report, and asked to supplement them with additional proposals or alternative options.

A VOLATILE THEATRE



- Russia would be more likely to engage in hybrid warfare than an outright conventional attack. Even if it were to engage in the latter, its military campaign would be characterized by unconventional dimensions.
- RAND's "timeline" – the notion that Russian forces would be approaching the Baltic capitals within 60 hours – cannot be asserted with certainty. It could take much more or less time for such sieges to begin.
- NATO's likely response would be heavily dependent upon naval operations, not just land forces.
- Belarus would endeavor to stay neutral in any conflict, and would resist Russian efforts to utilize its territory for an invasion of the Baltic.



PHASE I: FIFTH COLUMNS



- Russia would seek to use hybrid warfare alongside any conventional invasion, harnessing separatist sentiment and extensive cyberattacks.
- Any invasion would trigger a highly contested domestic environment, with local Baltic forces engaging in urban warfare.
- Belarus would endeavor to stay neutral in any conflict, aware that its territory would be liable to attack by Western militaries were it to enable the Russian advance.



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Putin could use ethnic Russian separatists, organized crime groups or anti-government/anti-NATO political groups against the Alliance.

Matthew Penn

Senior Analyst, Wikistrat

PHASE I:

EXPECT ESCALATION



- The training and morale of Russian ground forces (and thus their effectiveness) are open to question, given that they have not fought a potentially superior force in living memory.
- Russia's air force would be more than just "moderately competent" and would be unencumbered by extensive rules-of-engagement restrictions.
- NATO would be likely to engage in "horizontal escalation" – i.e., making use of naval assets to strike the Russian advance, blockade Russian ports and enable the seizure of Kaliningrad.



FORCE STRUCTURE MATTERS



- Economic pressure in the form of sanctions and embargoes would likely be “priced in” to any Russian military operation and would not prove effective in stopping it once launched.
- The movement of additional NATO military forces into the Baltic would not deter Russia in and of itself. Efforts to demonstrate political will are needed, in addition to the deployment of new capabilities.
- Anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) measures (such as MANPADS) have a greater deterrent effect than the deployment of new offensive capabilities.
- Integrating NATO special forces within existing Baltic force structures would be more effective than deploying complete units from NATO member states.



NATO should initiate an enhanced program that integrates U.S./NATO special operations units into the forces of their respective Baltic hosts. This will increase opportunities for joint training missions, intelligence gathering and reconnaissance, as well as overall joint force cohesion. It will also provide a much greater opportunity to assess the risks of ethnic separatism and the potential for Russian “grey zone” operations.

Dr. David Kear

Senior Analyst, Wikistrat

PHASE II:

CREDIBLE DETERRENTS



- Pre-positioning heavy equipment in Poland would force Russia to conduct a broader first strike in order to achieve its goals, something that would elevate the likelihood of triggering an Article V response.
- Signaling NATO's economic warfare intentions ahead of time could raise the threshold of decision for any Russian use of force.
- Far greater use of naval assets should be incorporated into contingency planning, as standoff maritime systems have the ability to strike advancing Russian forces and disrupt logistics supply chains.



STRATEGIC TAKEAWAYS



- RAND's recommendation is geared to solving a particular problem – namely, a major Russian conventional assault. Yet it cannot be expected to effectively prevent the most likely option: a hybrid warfare campaign.
- NATO can better deter such a campaign by inserting defensive equipment (e.g., anti-aircraft batteries) rather than offensive weapons which could be seen as provocative.
- Integrating NATO units within Baltic force structures would be more effective than deploying standalone brigades comprised entirely of troops from individual NATO member countries.
- NATO members need to signal in advance the economic costs that would accompany any Russian use of force.
- Additional efforts are needed to both generate and signal resolve for the purposes of deterrence, rather than relying upon the deployment of additional capabilities.



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