

Baltic Challenge

a Matrix Game about NATO / Russian
posturing in the Baltic Sea.



Baltic Challenge

by Maj Tom Mouat and Others (MORS Special Event) 19 Oct 2016.

Background¹

Russia's deployment of nuclear-capable missiles to its Kaliningrad exclave is setting off warning bells in the Baltics and at NATO. This is not the first time that the Russians have deployed Iskander-M short-range ballistic missiles to Kaliningrad and it may not be the last. Indeed, some experts believe Russia's long-term plan is eventually to deploy the weapons permanently to the Russian enclave, sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania.

The Iskander-M system is relatively modern and was introduced into the Russian military in 2006. It is highly mobile - a pair of missiles are carried on a heavy-wheeled launcher. The missile is known as the SS-26 and code-named "Stone" by NATO. Fired from Kaliningrad, it can reach all of the Baltic republics and probably about two-thirds of Poland.

It is controversial on two counts - because of its range and because it is dual-capable. In other words, it can carry either a conventional or a nuclear warhead. Armed with a nuclear weapon, its range of in excess of some 500km (300 miles) brings it into the scope of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty of 1987 which effectively bans the development and deployment of such weapons.

The US already believes that Russia has breached this treaty in its development work, but the regular deployment of the Iskander probably marks another nail in the coffin of the arms control agreements inherited from the Cold War.

Russia stresses that this deployment is part of a routine exercise. But equally, in the past it has brandished the Iskander system as a response to NATO's plans to deploy anti-ballistic missile defences in Europe. Russia has made several threats to target countries deploying elements of any missile defence system with nuclear weapons. Indeed, Russia's nuclear doctrine has also been re-written to afford a greater and earlier role for nuclear weapons in any regional conflict.

Poland and Estonia have both expressed concern at this latest deployment. The Chief of Staff of the Estonian Defence Forces, Lt Gen Riho Terras, sees the Iskander as part of a long-term Russian desire "to bring the Baltic Sea and the passages leading to it more and more under its control, and to control it much as it does the Black Sea".

Kaliningrad facts

Koenigsberg, as the city of Kaliningrad was once known, was founded by Teutonic knights in the 13th Century. It was once the capital of Prussia. It was annexed by Russia from Germany after WWII. Germans fled or were expelled. It is more than 300km away from Russia, which can only be reached through an EU country. It houses the Russian Baltic Fleet and is the country's only ice-free European port.

This is all part of a developing Russian strategy of what NATO characterises as an "anti-access and area denial": deploying weapons systems and sensors with ever-longer range (or, in the case of Kaliningrad, to a location where even relatively short-range will do) to push NATO forces away from the area.

Russia's long-range radars and air defence systems in Syria, for example, reach well out into the Mediterranean and into Turkish air space. The Estonian general's comments about the Black Sea are timely, since many NATO experts fear that it is fast becoming, in effect, a Russian-controlled lake.

The view from Moscow

Seen from Moscow, however, the picture is very different. Russia has watched NATO expand its membership ever closer to Russian borders. Countries like the Baltic republics, whose territory was once part of the Soviet Union, are now active NATO members. It is a trend that Russian President Vladimir Putin - who sees the collapse of Soviet power as a major tragedy - will neither condone nor forget.

¹ Source BBC.

NATO is now reinforcing its military presence in the Baltics and Poland in response to Russia's growing assertiveness in the wake of its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine and its involvement in the fighting in eastern Ukraine. This again provides probably another motive for the deployment of the Iskander missiles.

Of course, the debate has an element of the chicken and the egg. Where did the cycle of escalation actually begin? For Russia, it is the original sin of NATO expansion, now worsened by ballistic missile defence and NATO military deployments (albeit very small) eastwards. For NATO, it is Russian resentment, nuclear threats, and above all, its invasion and annexation of part of a sovereign country - Ukraine.

Russia's deployment of the Iskander serves multiple strategic purposes beyond the purely military. It is intended to remind the Western public - and particularly those in the Baltic republics - of the nuclear stakes in facing up to Moscow.

It is part of the signalling in a wider information war between Russia and NATO, where Moscow seeks to divide the Atlantic alliance and to secure for itself the ability to do as it pleases in what it sees as its near-abroad. Thus, Russian-backed forces control parts of Georgia; Russia has annexed Crimea and backs pro-Russian militias in eastern Ukraine.

The problem for NATO is that the Baltic republics, whilst once Soviet territory, are now firmly within the Western camp. It has to draw clear lines to confront Moscow's influence while trying to avoid escalating any crisis further.

ISKANDER-M TACTICAL BALLISTIC MISSILE SYSTEM

ISKANDER-M'S ELEMENTS



SELF-PROPELLED LAUNCHER

- CREW	3
- NUMBER OF MISSILES	2 (+ 2 ON TRANSLOADER)
- MAXIMUM ROAD SPEED	70 KM/H
- OPERATIONAL RANGE	1 000 KM
- COMBAT WEIGHT	40 T
- OPERATING TEMPERATURE RANGE	-50 °C TO +50 °

WARHEADS

- CLUSTER
- FUEL-AIR EXPLOSIVE
- BUNKER-BUSTING
- ELECTRO-MAGNETIC PULSE
- NUCLEAR

MISSILE SPECIFICATIONS

- LAUNCH RANGE	50 - 500 KM
- MISSILE WEIGHT	3,800 KG
- WARHEAD WEIGHT	480 - 700 KG
- SPEED	2,100 M/S (MACH 6.2)
- TIME TO LAUNCH	4 - 16 MIN
- INTERVAL BETWEEN LAUNCHES	UP TO 1 MIN



GUIDANCE SYSTEM - INERTIAL GUIDANCE, OPTICAL DSMAC, USE OF GPS / GLONASS IN ADDITION TO THE INERTIAL GUIDANCE SYSTEM



What are Matrix Games?

Matrix games are different to normal Wargames. In most of those games you will probably compare lists of statistics and peer at complicated books of rules containing someone else's idea about what things are important, before making a decision, checking that it is covered by the rules and rolling dice to see if you succeed. It can take a long time, look really complicated and can be very difficult to explain to a newcomer. Instead, in a Matrix Game you simply use words to describe why something should happen, the Facilitator or the players (or both) decide how likely it is, and you might roll a dice to see if it happens (but equally, in the face of a compelling argument, you might not need to). If you can say "This happens, for the following reasons..." you can play a Matrix Game.

The games themselves are not intended to be fiercely competitive, with obvious winners and losers. Instead they operate with the players working to generate a credible narrative. It is from examination of this narrative after the game that the players gain insights into the situation being portrayed. The player roles have objectives that will

probably place them in conflict with other players, but it is perfectly possible for all of the players to achieve at least some of their objectives by the end of the game.

Where did they come from?

The Chris Engle Matrix Game was created in the USA by Chris Engle, and published in 1992. Chris wanted to create a system by which it was possible for a player to "role-play" anything from a single person to an entire country. Chris felt that previous numbers-ridden game designs essentially missed the point (and anyway were too complicated and boring). What he wanted was a system that could take into account anything the players thought was relevant, including intangible elements such as culture, beliefs, and perceptions of themselves. Taking as his starting point the work of the philosopher Emmanuel Kant, Chris began to develop a "matrix" of cue words that would form the framework for his "model". To this he added Georg Hegel's idea that argument and counter-argument (thesis and antithesis) lead to a synthesis or consensus of ideas.

Thus, the basic idea of the Matrix Game was formed. Over the years the actual "matrix" of cue words has been dropped, but the name has stuck. Like all good ideas, the Matrix Game is very simple in concept, but has huge potential in that it can be adapted to fit any game setting. Matrix Games have been used by the UK MOD with the Unmanned Underwater Vehicle capability, education of Consultants in UK MOD Procurement systems and in the preparation by HQ ARRC for the deployment into Bosnia. They have even been used by the US DOD, McGill University in Canada, the UK Air Warfare Centre and the Defence Academy of the UK, as well as numerous other organisations all over the world.

How to Play a Matrix Game

In a Matrix Game, actions are resolved by a structured sequence of logical "arguments". Each player takes turns to make an argument, with successful arguments advancing the game, and the player's position. There are a number of ways you can do this, depending on the size of the game and the purpose (each has their own strengths and weaknesses), but the one recommended for this game is:

The "Pros and Cons" System

In this system, each argument is broken down into:

- The active Player states: Something That Happens and a Number of Reasons Why it Might Happen (Pros).
- The other Players then state: A Number of Reasons Why it Might NOT Happen (if they can think of any) (Cons).

The game needs a Facilitator to adjudicate on the arguments, but if you have a limited number of players, you can take it in turns to be the Facilitator – this works out much better than you might imagine and helps reinforce the idea that your role in the game might be in conflict with others, but you are all working together to generate a credible narrative.

The advantage of this system is that you formalise the Pros and Cons of an argument and the role of the Facilitator becomes that of ensuring that the Pros and Cons carry equal weight - perhaps making compelling reasons worth two Pros and two or three weaker reasons against only worth one Con. You need to ensure you don't end up with a laundry list of trivial reasons, or the player re-stating a reason already accepted in a slightly different way in a desperate attempt to gain points.

One very useful benefit of the "Pros and Cons" system is that it provides reasons for failure should the dice roll not succeed. You can also more easily run the game with very knowledgeable players.

Notes about arguments

The important thing to remember in a Matrix game is that arguments can be made about anything that is relevant to the scenario. You can argue about your own troops or about the enemy, the existence of people, places, things or events, the weather, plague, disease or public opinion. This can seem a little odd to some players – "how can he argue about my troops?" – It is true, he can't give them orders, but he could argue that their morale and motivation are low because they haven't been paid in months. The only criteria for judgement is the likelihood of the event taking place. With a bit of imagination, common sense and rational thinking, it is possible to present persuasive

arguments as to what should happen in any scenario - from traditional military campaigns to the strange world of defence procurement.

A common error in Matrix games is for a player to argue about another player being influenced by something or them agreeing to a course of action. The player is present and can simply be asked – so that a little time between turns to allow the players to negotiate with each other (in secret if necessary) makes for a better game. It might be that a player wants to argue that all parties come to negotiations – in which case let them state their case, then ask the other players if they want to come along. If they agree then the argument is an automatic success. Arguments are for actions – if the players want to negotiate with each other, they can do that in between turns.

Sometimes players get carried away with their arguments and try to do several different things. This isn't allowed in a Matrix game – you only get to do one action a turn because part of the insight comes from deciding what the highest priority is. The action itself could be large (like a general mobilisation of the Militia), but it must be a single action, so mobilising the Militia and providing the Police with heavy weapons would be two separate actions – which one do you want to do first?

If two arguments are in direct opposition ("This happens" - "No it doesn't") they represent a Logical Inconsistency since they cannot both be true. The earlier argument has already happened, so it is impossible for it not to have happened. The later player may argue that the event is reversed, but this tends to make for a poor narrative in the game and should be discouraged (see Playing Tips below).

Reasonable Assumptions and Established Facts

It is important that the Facilitator understands the difference between "reasonable assumptions" in the game, such as the proposition that well trained and equipped Special Forces soldiers are going to be much more effective in combat than untrained protestors; and "established facts" which are facts that have been specifically mentioned in the game briefings or have become established during play as the result of successful arguments.

The former can be deployed as supporting reasons (Pros and Cons), but the latter need to have been argued successfully in order for them to be included. Many inexperienced players will make vast all-encompassing arguments full of assumptions that are not reasonable. For example: It is not a reasonable assumption that an unarmed Protestor counter could fight off trained Police. It is reasonable to assume that the Police are trained, armed, equipped and quite capable of dealing with a group of protestors (after all, that is their job). It would be necessary to argue for large number of Protestors, argue that they had weapons of some sort or argue that they were especially devoted or fanatical about their cause, for them to have a reasonable chance of beating the Police.

Of course, you might argue that your Protesters undergo special training, get access to firearms, or are simply fired up with enthusiasm by the powerful and impassioned speech from their leader, so they get a bonus. In this case, you should mark the counter with a +1 or something similar (depending on the strength of the argument) to show their improved status.

Turn Length

Another important element to the game is working out how long each turn is supposed to represent. In this game, it is "about two weeks" (a variable length of time from a week to a little longer than a fortnight), so arguments need to be made about things that could take place over that time.

End of Turn "Consequence Management"

At the end of each game turn (a cycle of player arguments) the Facilitator should go over those successful and failed arguments that have generate new "established facts" in the game. They should also review situations that are on-going, such as the generation of refugees from fighting or the arrival of new recruits to a popular cause. If these have not been countered during the turn by a successful argument, the Facilitator should make them continue until someone does make an argument to stop them.

It might also be that some of the arguments, when considered as a whole, will have additional or even unintended consequences that are reasonable to expect to arise. It is therefore worth taking time to consider the consequences

of the players' arguments beyond their immediate results. Invite the players to consider the events of the turn, suggest possible consequences and then agree on the most likely that should be taken forward to the next turn.

In some games, it is worthwhile having an individual (if you have one to spare) who is particularly experienced about the sort of subject that the matrix game is focussed on, make "the law of unintended consequences" arguments at the end of a turn. This can help to formalise the process and provide good examples to widen the players' understanding of the consequences of their actions.

Inter-Turn Negotiations

As we have already said, the actual "arguments" of the Matrix Game are about actions that take place in the course of the game. In most cases, the actors represented by the players may well want to engage in face to face negotiation with each other in an effort to strike a deal. Players attempting to make Arguments saying that they want to "influence the Prime Minister" are essentially pointless if the Prime Minister is represented by another player. If they want to strike a deal, then they had better head off to a quiet corner of the room and try a little influence in real life. Of course, if a player wants to make an argument about a position or group not represented by another player, they are welcome to do so in the normal way.

In analytical games, it is important to record the essential elements of these discussions. What was suggested? Was agreement reached and why? If no agreement was reached what were the private and public reasons why the negotiations were unsuccessful? Analysis of these "off-table" negotiations and the reasons the players felt why they were successful or failures can provide important insights.

Secret arguments

There will be some cases where you want to hide from the other players the thing you want to argue about. It could be that you have booby trapped a piece of equipment you think your opponent will use, or that you have swapped the vital blueprints for a set of fake ones in case the safe is broken into. In this case, you simply write down your argument on a piece of paper, and present it to the Facilitator announcing to the other players that you are making a secret argument. The Facilitator will make a judgment and you will roll the dice normally, but the other players have no idea what it is about.

You should be careful, however, that the players don't make too many secret arguments. This can ruin the game's atmosphere and reduce the focus, so that the game drags on unnecessarily. They also depend on the judgement of the Facilitator as to their success or failure, rather than being decided on a consensual basis from the participants. They must only be permitted when they refer to quite specific things or events. An argument about gathering information from a spy, in most games, will be quite a generic argument and should be argued openly. Similarly Arguing about the placement of an IED to catch forces moving down a route should be made openly as the results will take effect the same turn. It is only really for secret things you need to establish several turns in advance.

Measures of Success

In many arguments success or failure may not be a simple "Yes" or "No" proposition. There might well be a sliding scale of success or failure in terms of numbers or the quality of the outcome, which is usually represented by the score on the dice. If you needed a 7+ to succeed and rolled a double-six (12), this can indicate an especially notable success. Conversely, a roll of a double-one, it could represent a disastrous failure.

Levels of Protection and Hidden Things

At the start of a game there are certain things that are not readily accessible to some of the player characters. For example, in a Cyber-Security Game the secret plans for a new submarine would be heavily protected.

Things that are hidden or secret require a successful argument merely to find them. Things that are protected will require successful arguments to overcome the different levels of protection. A secret government base may declared by the Facilitator to have 3 levels of protection: Its hidden location, its boundary fence, and the security guards, all of which must be overcome by successful arguments before the base can be penetrated.

As a rule of thumb, nothing should have more than 3 levels of protection as it will simply take too long and dominate the game to the exclusion of everything else.

Big Projects

Depending on the level of the game, some actions and events represent such a large investment in time and effort that they require multiple arguments in order to bring them to fruition. As a rule of thumb, a Big Project should also take no more than 3 successful arguments (like protected and hidden things above); otherwise the game is focussed too much on this single thing.

Number of Players

Matrix Games are best played with an even number of players as it is the action and counter-action running through the game that generates the insights. If you have an odd number, the extra person should be the facilitator. The game works best with 6-8 players and a facilitator.

More information

More information and examples of recreational Matrix Games can be found at:
<http://www.mapsymbols.com/wdmatrix.html> .

The original Chris Engle Matrix Game site is here: <http://hamsterpress.net/> .

A very good website that has developed the Pros and Cons system: "The Open Ended Machine" is here:
<http://theopenendedmachine.blogspot.co.uk/>.

The graphics for the counters came from marketing images of the Rocketbox library of 3D computer models at:
<http://www.rocketbox-libraries.com/> .

Matrix Game Methodology Support to V2010 Olympic Marine Security Planners by Antony Zegers at:
<http://www.professionalwargaming.co.uk/MatrixGameOlympics.pdf>. This is a report by DRDC CORA dated 2011 about the use of Matrix Games.

International C2 Journal at: <http://www.professionalwargaming.co.uk/MatrixGameC2Journal.pdf>. Composing Effective Environments for Concept Exploration in a Multi-Agency Context by Helen Mitchard and Simon Ng (Defence Science and Technology Organisation, AUS). This is another report on the use of Matrix Game techniques

There has been quite a lot of discussion about Matrix games on the "PAXsims" Blog that is worth reading:
<https://paxsims.wordpress.com/?s=Matrix+Game>

Professor Rex Brynen was also interviewed by the GrogHeads "GrogCast" Podcast, a copy of what he said about Matrix Games is here: <http://grogheads.com/?podcast=grogcast-season-2-episode-12> with the discussion about Matrix Games starting at the 31 minute mark.

Turn Order

- Russian Dissident Groups in the Baltic States.
- The Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania).
- Russia.
- Poland.
- The USA.
- The Nordic States (Sweden and Finland).
- NATO (other than the USA).

Briefings

Over.

Russia.

The west is morally and ideologically bankrupt, racked by double standards – a case of “do as I say, and not as I do”, lecturing to others over the free press, democracy, human rights and rule of law/lack of graft, when western elites hardly follow these norms themselves, and too often can be bought and subject to outside manipulation.

Russia’s agenda is to see Russia return to parity as a global power with the US and China – to sit again at the global great power table. Russia is to be respected by its peers and Russian strategic interests are also to be respected. As a global power Russia, is entitled to its own sphere of influence, and buffers against rival powers are a key part of this defensive doctrine. This naturally falls in the near abroad, particularly including Ukraine.

Russia has a “defensive” right to be able to intervene in and shape developments in the near abroad, rather as the US has shown a willingness to intervene in the past in its “backyard” in central America (Nicaragua) and the Caribbean (Grenada and Cuba), and even Latin America.

Russia also wants the US and the west to respect Russia’s right to determine its own form of governance, the principal of “sovereign democracy”, and to refrain from intervening in Russian domestic affairs, which are the preserve of Russians. Regime change and coloured revolutions are to be resisted, as they only bring disorder and chaos, as has been proven from Russia's perspective at least in the Middle East (Iraq, Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Syria), the CIS (Georgia, Ukraine and the Krygyz Republic) and ultimately lower standards of living.

Kaliningrad is a Russian exclave to the west of the Baltics, bordering Lithuania and Poland, both NATO allies. The reasons Kaliningrad is of immense strategic importance to Russia are many. It is the only port in Europe of Russia’s that remains ice free throughout the year, it houses the headquarters of the pivotal Russian Baltic Navy fleet, it houses two air bases of the Air Force, it houses a large number of Russian ballistic missiles, and its location is particularly advantageous. It is no surprise then that Russia is preparing to exploit the region’s location to gain a strategic military advantage by formulating directed military policy for the region.

The Soviet Union understood the strategic importance of Kaliningrad early on and realised the need to militarise it. It soon became the headquarters of famed Soviet Baltic Navy fleet. Kaliningrad was used as the first line of defence of the inner Soviet Union and played an important role in protecting North-Western Russia from any attack in the Baltic Sea. While initially, Soviet commanders had planned Kaliningrad as a defensive outpost, they slowly began to realise its importance as a support base for an offensive strike as well. Kaliningrad was used by the Soviet Union as an important support base and kept armaments in Kaliningrad that might be used by incoming Soviet soldiers to launch a large-scale offensive towards the West.

Post the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Kaliningrad came under Russian administration despite being geographically cut off and surrounded by Lithuania and Poland which soon became NATO allies.

Russia has deployed the short range Iskander ballistic missiles, capable of carrying a nuclear warhead to Kaliningrad. Russia undertook anti-submarine training exercises in the Baltic Sea using specialised anti-submarine Ka-27 helicopters. Russia has also positioned coastal radars used to cue K-300P Anti-Ship missiles in Kaliningrad for use in the Baltic sea. The surface to air S-400 missiles, the most modern that Russia has, have been deployed in large number in Kaliningrad. Russia has flown several sorties out of two major air bases, Chernyakhovsk and Donskoye, very close to and at times even over the air space of Lithuania.

All of these concerted actions make it evident that Russia is now focusing on building Kaliningrad to be an effective A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) base. A2/AD is a strategy by which a military denies its adversary access to certain strategic areas by an employment of various land, air and sea based weaponry. An integration of other commands such as the newly formed Aerospace Command and the Electronic Warfare Command is also expected in Kaliningrad along with conventional military to support this tactical A2/AD strategy.

Of course accusations that the Iskander missile breaks the INF treaty by the Americans are hypocritical as the "Aegis Ashore" BMD capability can fire Tomahawk cruise missiles - which would also break the treaty.

Russian Dissident Groups in the Baltic States.

During the Soviet era, hundreds of thousands of people moved to the Baltic countries: engineers, doctors, teachers and other professionals. When the Soviet Union fell, many of them left the countries along with the former Soviet Army. Those who stayed along with their children and grandchildren form ethnic Russian minorities in the Baltic countries.

During the first years, post-independence, the treatment of Russians by the local population was awful and discriminatory and it remained that way for a long time. It was (and still is) usual for Russians to hear such insults as “occupier,” “Kremlin spies” and a very popular phrase “Take your luggage, go to the station and move to Russia.” The problem is that Baltic Russians don’t consider Russia as their motherland and many of them have never visited the country. They love their resident countries where they are third-generation residents. Russia for them is a land of their ancestors, land of the same faith and a close culture, but nothing more.

To become a citizen of Latvia or Estonia, a member of the minority should undergo a process of naturalisation: pass exams in the local language, history and constitution. It seems to be a justified claim: a person should know the language of the country he lives in. But in the Baltic countries, even passing these tests changes little for Russians. They remain second-rung residents and foreigners forever. Despite advances, the number of stateless individuals is still alarming in these two countries, as the percentages are at 18% for Latvia and 13% for Estonia of the total population.

Many Russians don’t want to become citizens of the Baltic country they live in because they are angry and tired after many years of poor treatment. Many others who did get citizenship used it as an opportunity to immigrate to another EU country. People of the older generation believe that they have worked hard whole their lives to create the prosperity found in the Baltic republics and so deserve the right to be citizens without any exams.

Many Russians understand Baltic grievances with the USSR, but they don’t understand why in the 21st century, they should be answerable for the sins of leaders from the distant past.

The mindset of the political class in the Baltic countries is discriminatory and the governments would be happy to cleanse the countries of ethnic Russians. They don’t try and hide this and don’t care much about the fact, that such a mindset is harming relations with the Russia. This anti-Russian ideology and human rights violations have cost the Baltic countries so many economic advantages. Nord Stream is one shining example. The EU, whose principles are based (as claimed) on human rights protection, ignores such obvious problems within their own borders, but likes to judge other states, including Russia. You hardly hear any criticism from Brussels of SS veterans' marches, which are held annually in Latvia and Estonia. Russia’s protests are always ignored.

The global economic crisis has hit Baltic countries in the hardest way. Having no natural resources and low industrial potential (what was leftover by the Soviets was terminated or sold for scrap) the Baltic countries seem to be in an economic black hole. Low salaries, high taxes and unemployment are forcing mass emigrations.

If Baltic people migrate only to western countries, Russians have a path to the east. The Russian Federation welcomes migrants of Russian origin, but after coming to the land of their ancestors, Baltic Russians realise that they have little in common with the local people. They look alike and speak the same language without any Baltic accent, but they are foreigners, people from another cultural domain, who were raised in a different social environment. Moscow Russians are more similar to people from distant Vladivostok than with those from nearby Tallinn or Riga.

The treatment of Russian minorities by the governments in the Baltic countries completely goes against the European values of multiculturalism. It is impossible to create a successful country by discriminating against a part of your own population. These people who could be loyal patriots are becoming enemies of their own homeland, as a direct result of the treatment they get. What is happening in the Baltic countries also shows how governments deliberately use nationalism and raise hatred among people to draw them away from real economic problems.

The Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania).

The Baltic states are located in Northern Europe, and because each has access to the sea, it is able to interact with many European countries. All three countries are parliamentary democracies. In Latvia and Estonia, the president is elected by parliament while Lithuania has a semi-presidential system where the president is elected by popular vote. All are parts of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Each of the three countries has declared itself to be the restoration of the sovereign nation that had existed from 1918 to 1940, emphasizing their contention that Soviet domination over the Baltic nations during the Cold War period had been an illegal occupation and annexation. The same legal interpretation is shared by the United States, the United Kingdom, and all other Western democracies, who held the forcible incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the Soviet Union to be illegal. At least formally, the Western democracies never considered the three Baltic states to be constituent parts of the Soviet Union.

After the Baltic states had restored their independence, integration with Western Europe became a major strategic goal. In 2002, the Baltic nations applied for membership in NATO and the EU. All three became NATO members on 29 March 2004, and accessed to the EU on 1 May 2004. The Baltic States are currently the only former-Soviet states that have joined either organization.

Both Washington and Moscow assign high strategic significance to the future disposition of the Baltic states. From Moscow's perspective, the three states are located close to the centres of Russian political and military power, and therefore are a potential base for devastating attacks. For instance, the distance between Lithuania's capital of Vilnius and Moscow is less than 500 miles -- a short trip for a supersonic aircraft. From Washington's perspective, failure to protect the Baltic states from Russian aggression could lead to the unravelling of America's most important alliance.

Washington has been very public about its commitment to the Baltic states. For instance, in 2014 President Obama stated during a visit to Estonia that defence of the three countries' capitals was "just as important as the defence of Berlin and Paris and London." That is an extraordinary assertion considering that the population of metropolitan London (about 8 million) is greater than that of all three Baltic states combined (about 6 million), and that the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea is so close to the Russian heartland.

There is a disconnect between the rhetoric that Washington applies to Baltic security and the tactical situation that would likely obtain in a future war. Russia has massive local superiority in every form of military force, and the topography of the three states presents few obstacles to being quickly overrun. The RAND Corporation reported earlier this year that in a series of war games, Russian forces were always able to overcome indigenous defenders and reach Baltic capitals within a few days. The forces of other NATO nations had little time to respond.

For all of its talk about reinforcing NATO at the recent alliance summit ("we will defend every ally" President Obama said), there is scant evidence the U.S. is willing to make the kind of commitment of conventional forces needed to blunt a Russian invasion in the Baltic region. The proposed placement of NATO-led battalions in each state totalling about 1,000 soldiers each is widely described as a "tripwire" defence, meaning it might trigger a bigger alliance response but would not be able to prevent Moscow from reaching its military objectives quickly.

Any counter-attack by NATO in the Baltics could easily be misconstrued by Moscow as a threat to its core interests, in part because some strikes against attacking forces would occur on Russian territory, and in part because Russia's fragile reconnaissance system would quickly be overwhelmed by the fog of war. Anthony Barrett of the RAND Corporation has recently produced a worrisome analysis detailing how an East-West conventional conflict along the Russian periphery could escalate to nuclear-weapons use through miscues or misjudgements.

Both sides in any such conflict would have military doctrine potentially justifying the use of nuclear weapons to prevent defeat. In the case of Russia, it has stated repeatedly that it needs non-strategic nuclear weapons to cope with the superiority of NATO conventional forces, that it would use such weapons in order to protect its core assets and values, and even that nuclear weapons might sometimes be useful tools for de-escalating a conflict. Successive U.S. administrations have stressed that nuclear weapons underpin alliance commitments. This has the potential to leave the Baltic states a barren radioactive wasteland if judgement fails.

Poland.

Polish national strategy pivots around a single, existential issue: how to preserve its national identity and independence. Located on the oft-invaded North European Plain, Poland's existence is heavily susceptible to the moves of major Eurasian powers. Therefore, Polish history has been erratic, with Poland moving from independence — even regional dominance — to simply disappearing from the map, surviving only in language and memory before emerging once again.

For some countries, geopolitics is a marginal issue. Win or lose, life goes on. But for Poland, geopolitics is an existential issue; losing begets national catastrophe. Therefore, Poland's national strategy inevitably is designed with an underlying sense of fear and desperation. Nothing in Polish history would indicate that disaster is impossible.

The Poles have been looking over their shoulders since the Ukraine conflict began, and since Russia accused them of setting up military training camps for the Euromaidan protesters in Kiev. The former head of the Ukrainian security service, Aleksandr Yakimenko, claimed that snipers in the Ukrainian unrest were acting under Polish and American orders.

Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski has signed into law a new national defence strategy that addresses an "intensifying policy of confrontation" by Russia and threats to regional security from the conflict in Ukraine. The 57-page strategy document replaces a plan drawn up in 2007. The new plan involves defence, political, and economic structures on all levels. It says Russian has become a negative factor for regional security because of the "rebuilding of its power status at the expense of its surroundings" and Moscow's "intensifying policy of confrontation" as shown by its seizure of the Crimea Peninsula from Ukraine. Komorowski told journalists in Warsaw on November 5 that things have "changed for the worse to the east of Poland's borders, where an area of instability has emerged."

The Polish military's ability to deter or delay a Russian attack sufficiently to give the United States — and whatever European allies might have the resources and intent to join the coalition — time to evaluate the situation, plan a response and then respond must be a key element of Polish strategy.

Poland perceives the threat from Russia's militarism and neo-imperialism as genuine, and as potentially going beyond the mere mid-level conflict scenario that Vladimir Putin requires in order to divert Russian society from its domestic problems and galvanise support for his regime. Polish political leaders will prepare for a "war as diversion" scenario as the most likely risk in the next few years, but they will also keep the "major war" option in the back of their minds.

Poland belongs to the group of European Union member states that will be most affected by an aggressive Russian foreign policy. Poland has a direct border with the Russian exclave, Kaliningrad Oblast, which because of its strategic location will remain the most militarised region in Europe. At the same time, Russia sees Kaliningrad as a vulnerable outpost because it is surrounded by the most "hawkish" NATO member states (Lithuania and Poland). If the Kremlin were to decide to have a local, short war with NATO, the Baltic republics would be among the most obvious targets for Russian military aggression. And if the conflict were to escalate, Russia would probably want to neutralise Poland by occupying the Polish-Lithuanian border region (the Suwałki corridor) located between Kaliningrad and Belarus.

Poland has the largest demographic, military, and economic potential of the countries on NATO's eastern flank and is thus perceived as Russia's main rival in the region. It also has the structural economic capacity to increase its power substantially. According to IMF projections, Polish GDP (PPP)² is currently three and half times smaller than Russia's. However, by 2030, this gap could decrease to a proportion of two-to-one in favour of Russia. Moreover, Poland is likely to maintain its military spending at its current high level (at least 2 percent of GDP) or even to beef it up further, since there is a rare consensus on the issue among the deeply divided Polish political elites. The Polish armed forces are undergoing a long-term and comprehensive modernisation process which, in the next decade, will substantially enhance their military capabilities. Poland is also the main promoter of regional security cooperation on the North-South Axis from Scandinavia through the Baltic republics, Romania, and Ukraine to Turkey.

² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_\(PPP\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(PPP))

The Nordic States (Sweden and Finland).

The countries in the Nordic region have direct and indirect roles in guaranteeing the security of the Baltic States. Historically, the Baltic States have had a very close relationship with the Nordic countries. Denmark and Norway have played an important role in developing Baltic military capabilities since the end of the Cold War, and Sweden and Finland, although not members of NATO also have a close security relationship with the Baltic States.

There is much concern about U.S. and NATO dependence on non-NATO Sweden and Finland to mount a credible defence or liberation of the Baltic States. Sweden and Finland are important allies for the U.S. and a close partner of NATO. However, neither is obligated to come to the assistance of any NATO member in the event of an armed attack. Therefore, the U.S. must plan accordingly.

In the event of a crisis breaking out around the Baltic Sea, secure access to the connections providing critical energy and communications infrastructure that link many states in the region becomes crucial to ensuring that NATO has the widest possible freedom of movement should the Alliance need to react in defence of any one of its Allies. As Finland and Sweden are key provider states within these developing Nordic-Baltic infrastructural networks, NATO should ensure that both these partner countries are given the option to be integrated strongly within the relevant contingency planning structures.

Maritime security issues also centre on the strategic position of Gotland (Sweden) and the Åland Islands (Finland). Defence of the Åland Islands is complicated by the demilitarized status they hold under international law. Gotland was demilitarized after the Cold War but has recently been remilitarized: in light of potential danger, Sweden is establishing a precautionary 300 strong battlegroup on the island. The Swedish defence analyst, Karlis Neretnieks, has argued that should Russia capture Gotland, which is located in the centre of the Baltic Sea, their forces could position mobile surface-to-air missiles there. While placing the security of NATO's Allies in the region at risk, such a move would again potentially restrict NATO's freedom of movement in the effort to respond in defence of these Allies. The same logic can apply in the case of the Åland Islands.

The Danish Straits consist of three channels connecting the Baltic Sea to the North Sea via the Kattegat and Skagerrak Seas. These straits are particularly important to the Baltic Sea nations as import and export routes. This is especially true for Russia, which has increasingly shipped its crude oil exports to Europe through Baltic ports. Overall, approximately 125,000 ships per year transit these straits. If the U.S. needed to intervene militarily in the Baltic States, access to the Danish Straits would be vital.

It would be naïve in the extreme to think Russia did not factor the importance of these three islands and the Danish Straits into their Baltic Sea contingency planning—and it would be just as irresponsible for the U.S. not to do the same.

Another matter to consider is the role of Kaliningrad in regional security. Kaliningrad is a small Russian exclave along the Baltic Sea, bordering both Lithuania and Poland. Kaliningrad is part of Russia's Western Military District, and approximately 25,000 Russian soldiers and security personnel are stationed there. It is home to Russia's Baltic fleet, which consists of around 50 vessels, including submarines. Perhaps most important for Moscow is that Kaliningrad is the heart of Russia's Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) strategy.

Russia has the advanced S400 air defence system in Kaliningrad and has likely deployed Iskander missiles there. Iskander missiles can carry nuclear or conventional warheads and have a range of up to 500km, placing Riga, Vilnius, and Warsaw within their reach. Russia also has facilities for storage of tactical nuclear weapons at Kaliningrad. (Whether nuclear weapons are presently there is a matter of much debate.) Russia is modernizing runways at its Chernyakhovsk and Donskoye air bases in Kaliningrad, providing Russia with nearby bases from which to fly near NATO airspace. Many of the aerial incidents that cause NATO planes from Baltic Air Policing to scramble involve Russian planes flying from or to bases in Kaliningrad.

NATO (other than the USA).

Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and its military actions in Ukraine have led transatlantic policy-makers to reassess collective defence arrangements across what is frequently referred to as NATO's "eastern flank". The region is of rising importance in the context of Europe's changing security order – and defence and deterrence was high on the agenda at the recent NATO summit meeting in Warsaw, Poland.

NATO has a strong role in coordinating closer security ties between the region's states. Finland and Sweden are not members of the Alliance and are therefore not covered by NATO's collective defence clause. However, the Allies are working closely with both countries – two of NATO's most active partners – to assess security in the Baltic Sea region, to expand exchanges of information, including on hybrid warfare, coordinating training and exercises, and to develop better joint situational awareness.

The Baltic states broadly welcomed the deterrence measures agreed at NATO's Wales Summit in 2014 to form the Readiness Action Plan (RAP). Nevertheless, many in the Baltics see it as a work in progress.

A core feature of the RAP is the 5000-strong Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) created within the NATO Response Force (NRF). Baltic capitals would, of course, prefer the guarantee of a larger and permanent NATO military presence on their territory, whereas the current arrangement under RAP stresses the "trip-wire" of small Allied rotations.

NATO's lead Allies – France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States – still prioritize resolving the wider eastern European security crisis through diplomatic means. This has led to a difficult balancing act: on the one hand, they aim to stay within the constraints of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act and avoid a tense military build-up along NATO's "eastern flank"; on the other, they seek to assure NATO's eastern members that any possible aggression will be credibly deterred.

The number of major exercises conducted by NATO fully encompassing the land, sea and air power of its Allies in the Baltic Sea region should be increased, despite political reluctance and cost concerns. With Russia conducting "snap" military exercises numbering 30,000-80,000 troops proximate to Baltic borders since the onset of the Ukraine crisis, the previous NATO exercises that have taken place in the region, such as the 6,000 strong Steadfast Jazz in November 2013, now seem rather modest. Larger exercises would serve to demonstrate NATO's credible commitment to deter one of the core aspects in Russia's application of "hybrid" warfare, namely the use of the presence of large-scale conventional forces close to the border of the target state as coercion.

Smaller exercises in the region also bring added value to NATO Allies. Conscript and volunteer units remain important for Estonia's territorial defence system and Lithuania recently decided to bolster its territorial defence through the reintroduction of conscription. Should a Russian military encroachment occur on Baltic territory, these conscript and volunteer forces working alongside their professional counterparts will be crucial to the early defence effort.

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The USA.

The Baltic has become an arena for repeated dangerous encounters between aggressively manoeuvring Russian jets and warships and NATO and US forces. This has been coupled with other kinds of coercive and intimidating measures, such as the snatch of an Estonian intelligence officer—from Estonian territory—by Russian forces shortly after President Obama's visit to Tallinn in 2014, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's 2016 statement threatening the use of force if Sweden and Finland choose to seek NATO membership at some point in the future.

Additionally, Russia is developing a powerful network of anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities in the Baltic Sea region, based on long-range weapons that would jeopardize US and NATO access and ability to operate in the region during a crisis or in war. While the possibility of war remains remote, the transatlantic community must be prepared for direct conflict between Russia and NATO over the Baltic States.

The United States must clearly and publicly signal that vital US security interests are at stake in the Baltic States. The United States is not doing Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia a favour by defending them, but rather securing its own interests in the region, in Europe, and as a leader of global alliances.

Russia's attempt to alter the European security order in its favour is a long-term challenge for the United States and the transatlantic community. The United States must show that it understands that this is a long-term contest and that the upcoming Warsaw Summit is merely the beginning of the formulation of a long-range response to the Russian challenge. One tangible way to do this would be to put the European Reassurance Initiative (increasing exercises and training, planning support, prepositioning equipment, increased US Navy presence) on a multi-year footing, instead of having it re-addressed annually by the US administration and US Congress.

A continued US presence in the Baltic region, and US participation in the expected multi-national units there, is crucial. However, it is not politically sustainable for the United States to be seen as acting alone in enhancing NATO's posture in the Baltic States. Therefore, the United States must encourage and drive other major NATO members to provide long-term contributions to the Alliance presence in the Baltic States.

Sweden and Finland are central actors in the Baltic Sea region and while not NATO members, they are important partners. They will play important roles in a crisis and defence contingency in the Baltic States by, for example, providing additional avenues of approach for reinforcements, contributing certain capabilities, and serving as advocates for action within the European Union and other international bodies. The United States should work to involve these two states in political exchanges, exercises, and planning for defence and deterrence in the Baltic States. Put differently, the Nordic side of the Baltic Sea would add depth and options to the defence of the Baltic States.

The many wargames played recently have proven themselves useful in identifying capabilities gaps, faulty planning assumptions, and Alliance dynamics. They have also served a useful purpose in educating leaders and policy experts on current European security dynamics, and socialized leaders on both sides of the Atlantic to the kinds of decisions that they may have to consider and make during a crisis. This is especially important in an age of cyber and non-linear warfare. It is therefore crucial that these efforts continue at all levels, from staff to senior national leadership.

Estonia has maintained its level of defence spending around NATO's commitment to 2 percent of GDP for some years; Lithuania is quickly approaching that target. This is an important accomplishment that should not be underestimated for the positive political signals it sends to Washington regarding Lithuania's commitment to its own defence and its understanding of the European security environment. Latvia is also moving in the right direction, albeit at a slower pace. The attention to defence spending must be maintained in the coming years and not simply come to represent a peak. This is especially important given the attention this issue is likely to attract during the US elections.

BALTIC CHALLENGE





